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“SON”



“SON”

BY

ETHEL TRAIN

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK

1911

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BY CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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TO SON

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FATHER was a person who occasionally just before bedtime emerged from a place called “Down Town” and interrupted Son’s mental activities by inviting the latter to ride on his shoulders. Now Son was by nature polite, and hated to disappoint, but if Father had only realized the horror . . . to look down and down at those dizzying stairs. . . .

“He will never be manly,” said Father.

Yet, the year before, when the doctor, being warned of Mother, had intimated that it would be necessary to hurt him, Son had stiffened his little frame and had let him go ahead. And the dark held for him only delight. His little room, where he slept alone, was his great pride. The light out, the photograph of Hofmann’s Christ over his head seemed to merge into the colored lithographs of Venice

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adorning the other walls, and above the blue waters, out of blue skies, looked down the Face. Son, half asleep, was wont to rouse himself from this ecstatic vision to make poetry, which he would repeat next morning to any one who could be got to listen. There was much of starry skies, and silent night, and the majesty of God in these lines, which were in blank verse,—for Son was only six.

“He talk all de time outdoors,” complained his nurse,—“so much dat before he get home he ask for a glass of water already.”

The family did not go to church, but Son got over this difficulty by holding service himself every Sunday morning. Baby attended regularly, but Mother found it out quite by chance when she heard “Onward, Christian Soldiers” taking its turn impartially with “When we fit for General Grant.”

Father, who wielded a facile pen, had brought home a dummy copy of his new book. It contained, beside title page and table of contents, untold wealth of blank pages. This

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treasure fell to the lot of Son, who had previously used up every scrap of paper in the house. Even the rolls wrapped about ribbon had been fed out, a sacrifice to his insatiable industry. Now, in his own room, he went to work, and every sheet was soon covered with drawings. These were in regular series, each ending with a colophon. Occasionally Son, being brought down to the drawing-room, was asked to exhibit his book. One day, on the knees of a distinguished musician, he explained it artlessly for nearly an hour. The visitor's arm stole round him, and the two heads bent in deep absorption over the paper. Son's clear voice, full of its subject, kept on and on, the words tumbling over each other in his eagerness: “There's the fire-engine — and here are the ladders — and there the house is burning — and they're going up and up — and now they've put the fire out perkefly well.”

The visitor left, and Son sat down in a corner with magazines. For a long time he paid no attention to the conversation of his

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family, but then an unusual note in Father's voice struck his unheeding ears and made him wriggle uneasily.

“What's the use?” Father was saying fretfully. “I'm not making a success of anything, neither literature nor law. I believe I'll give it all up and go into farming—or a ranch. How would you like to live on a ranch?”

Mother adjusted the ruffles of her pretty tea-gown. Son enjoyed the soft “frou-frou” made by the flowing sleeves when she moved her arms. He cast a glance at her, and it showed him her brow serene—as he had expected. Mother's brow was never furrowed; her equanimity was not disturbed by the problem of the men of her family. Son knew that. “How absurd!” she was saying in her sweet voice. “A ranch! You know I hate riding. You are really tired out, dear. I'm glad the Merrills have given up their dinner on account of her aunt's death. Besides, I have had the motor out all day, and I should really have been ashamed to order it

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around again. We'll dine quietly, and you shall go to bed early.”

“The motor,” he continued irritably. “We ought never to have bought it. Why, I can't get rid of the mortgage hanging over this house. If you would only let me explain the accounts to you.”

“I'm so stupid at figures,” broke in Mother. Then she added, her voice rising a little: “But if I'm to live in New York with no way of getting about, we *will* go away. You've talked of nothing but expenses every time we've had an evening at home for weeks.”

A pink spot showed in either cheek, and tears — Could it be possible that there were tears in Mother's eyes?

Son was not the only one troubled by this thought.

“Never mind,” Father said in a voice that was — well, no — Son didn't think it was cheerful exactly — “I suppose we shall get on as we are. Don't worry.”

“I don't believe in worrying,” said Mother.

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That night Son did not see his pictures. What was a mortgage? And why must one have motors to get about? He fell asleep, and in his dream the mortgage with big dark wings hovered over the house, making a noise like that of the ventilators the chimney expert had put on the roof, over the chimneys that wouldn't draw.

The next day was Thursday. Son had been taken away bodily from his pursuits to be made ready for school. School was an innovation in his life, and although his teacher had often remarked upon his improvement (“When she kisses the top of my head,” he recounted at home), this was only part compensation for the loss of time involved.

After school he had to rest; after lunch, to go out. On coming in, he was dressed for supper. After supper he seized upon a chance volume belonging to Baby, and began to sound letters.

“Only one more paragraph,” admonished Mother, who had come in. She felt quite weary at sight of his struggles.

“Son”

Son stopped obediently and came over. Something was working in his mind. “Mother,” he began. But Mother was watching Baby. She preferred this occupation to answering questions. Son could understand that. He had the gentleman’s chivalric adoration of the little lacy thing, with her curls, her red cheeks, her dancing feet. He loved to see her dark eyes flash when she said, “Don’t do dat, Sonny!” Even when she grabbed his pencil or snatched his paper away, he looked down on her with eyes of love. Well, there was still the old geography Mother had used when she was a little girl, to her scant profit. Son got it out. Father could be diverted from thoughts of shoulder-riding, and from him, if not from Mother, it was possible to elicit geographical information. This was sometimes given in a voice that sounded so loud and decided to Son that it quite paralyzed him, and he was expected to remember a great many things all at once that Father had known all his life. But he would thaw out when he was undress-

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ing, and say everything over instead of unbuttoning his buttons.

On this evening the geography had no charms for him. The Thought would come between. When Baby was tucked into her crib, he tried again. “Mother.” Now Mother was systematic, and it was bedtime. So she hurried him off, promising to send Father up if he should come home early enough.

Son lay in bed listening. He knew that if Father came home he would hear the Thought. But Father had gone to the club to play squash, and did not get home until just in time to dress for dinner.

“He is asleep by this time,” said Mother. “Do you know,” she added, “the activity of that child’s mind is such that it actually tires me.”

The next morning, having been out until the small hours, Father and Mother slept late, and the Thought remained unspoken. He came home from school and found Mother out for lunch, which he ate with Baby. Then

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Son did the unheard-of thing. He put on his overcoat, but forgot all the buttons, tucked his book under his arm, and walked out of the house by himself. He was going to “Down Town” to have some one print it. There were several of his friends to whom he wished to give copies,—the musician who was so full of comprehension though he had no boy of his own; a friend of Mother’s, who had taken it home to show her family and had returned it *by a messenger*; and Baby, who did n’t understand, but that was no matter.

That he was doing wrong never occurred to him, not even when he was eluding his nurse. She was one of those persons to whom it was not worth while to try and explain. Therefore he eliminated her.

He had a few qualms as he crossed the avenues, missing unemotionally the accustomed hand which alternately jerked him forward or pulled him back. But he managed quite well by himself, owing to the politeness of the chauffeurs, who in all cases refrained

“Son”

from running him down. Once on Fifth Avenue he felt in his pocket for his little pocket-book, which contained, beside a penny, a five-dollar gold piece given him by his grandmother on her last visit. Having been passed by two omnibuses, the drivers of which had failed to observe his signal, he boarded a third, the conductor accosting him as “Sonny” and lifting him in. It was pleasant to be known by name, and Son felt quite at home. He had some difficulty in deciding which of the two coins he should present as his fare, as it was hard to part with either. Finally he determined to give up the gold piece, as it did not shine quite so beautifully as the penny.

The conductor, after a curious glance at his passenger, accepted it without demur, then to Son’s great surprise began to shower him with money. He put it into Son’s pockets himself, until they bulged with it. Son’s first impulse had been to refuse it, as he had been instructed never to take money from strangers, but on second thought, under the circum-

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stances, he decided to accept it. Then the conductor, while showing Son a little hole into which he must pop the last coin, a ten-cent piece, drew down upon himself the wrath of a passenger whose repeated button pressings from the outside had failed to make the bus stop, and hastened back to his post.

The vehicle began to fill, and Son sat quietly observing his fellow-passengers. Once he rose to offer his seat to a lady, but the space vacated was almost imperceptible, and, besides, he had not noticed that a man was in the act of alighting. The lady sat down without having seen Son, so he resumed his seat. At the end of the route he made his descent somewhat doubtfully. The conductor appeared to be busy, so Son did not interrupt him.

In the street he stood quite still, hugging his book under his arm. He was cheerful, but had not determined upon his next move. Then he decided to follow the downward-moving crowd. It was a brisk day, and people walked in a springy and elastic fash-

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ion. Son imitated this. He even tried to whistle, an accomplishment so new that he did not make a success of it. At a street corner he perceived a small crowd, all male. His eyes did not travel further than their legs, until some one, without comment, picked him up and swung him shoulderward. Higher than the derby hats, he could now look down upon the street preacher, who was waving his arms and telling about Heaven.

“But, beloved,” he shouted fervently, “be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years.”

“I’ll have plenty of time to do my work *then*,” thought Son.

Work—he was forgetting. He had no more precious moments to spend then. In response to his request, he was set gently on his feet, and made off, but without resuming his manly stride. Ten minutes later he arrested his small perplexed footsteps at sight of another human being who was likewise walking without seeming to know his destination. Son was not dismayed by the length of this person’s

“Son”

hair, nor by the dark and dreadful-looking hat pulled far down over his forehead, for under the hat gleamed a pair of prepossessing gray eyes. These presently fixed themselves upon Son, before he had determined what mode of address to use in accosting the stranger.

“Fine day,” said the stranger easily.

Son had not come all this distance to discuss the weather.

“I want to find a printing man,” he said, “to print my book. Do you know any?”

The stranger began at Son’s cap and let his eyes descend slowly, missing nothing—from delicately shaped, cropped head to small, squarely planted feet.

“I didn’t button all the buttons,” said Son apologetically, watching the eyes in the descent, “because, you see, they’re so stiff. And it takes so much time.”

“Of course it does,” agreed the stranger. “Shall we find a secluded place where we can talk?”

“Son”

Son did not know what a secluded place was, but he felt that it would be safe to go there, and put his mittened hand into that of his new acquaintance.

They walked through a labyrinth of crooked streets, and finally came out on a big sunny square, where there were trees and a few Italian children playing about a fountain. Nurse-maids who had not already taken their charges indoors walked with unusual alacrity behind their perambulators.

“In here are benches,” said Son’s new companion. “Now show it to me.”

“I think you could see better,” Son answered gladly, “if you were nearer. I’ll climb up on the bench.”

He did, and the stranger, over Son’s shoulder, took a brief survey of the contents of the book.

“But these are drawings, and not in my line,” he said after a few pages. “I am a poet,” he added solemnly.

“I make poetry too,” said Son, nothing daunted.

“Son”

“The — I mean — you *do*?” said the man.
“Let’s hear some.”

There was a beautiful vibrating note in his voice which made Son quite willing to fold his hands and comply with this request.

He began, still standing on the bench and facing the other poet :

“Good-bye, my blue bell!
All winter long
Blue bell is resting
While I sing my song.

“The snow is her blanket
When the leaves are gone;
Blue bell is resting
While I sing my song.”

The man did not say anything for a moment. While Son waited, his eye travelled the dusty streets.

“Any more?” he asked then.

“Oh, yes,” Son answered. “Lots and lots!”

“Out with it,” encouraged the man.

Son continued in his clear voice :

“Son”

“In the forest green and wild,
When just one bird is singing,
How pleasant it seems to you and me
By the flowers gleaming.”

“Have you been in the woods?” asked the man.

“No-o,” Son admitted. “But that’s the way I think they are. I made that when I was going down town with Mother to buy my clothes.”

“Do you write them down?” said the man.

Son smiled. “I can’t write,” he said. “I know them. I can’t stay any longer,” he added firmly.

“Just one more,” pleaded the man.

“Then I’ll say ‘The Sun’s Call,’” agreed Son after a moment’s deliberation.

“The first day of the summer

The Sun arose to call the flowers.

He called them by name:

‘Come, daffodils, crocuses, violets, and daisies, —

Come, sit in the wood’s shade in glee.’

No sooner he’d spoken, they came marching in
form,

Marching so happily.

“Son”

“The second day of the summer
The Sun arose to call the birds.
He called them by name;
‘Come, bluebird, come, robins and chickadees
too, —
Come, sit in the wood’s shade and sing.’
No sooner he’d spoken, they came marching by
twos,
And sweetly they did sing.”

“I’ll take you to a printing man,” said Son’s new friend abruptly. “Come along.”

Hand in hand, they walked for many blocks in silence. Before an imposing looking building they stopped.

“Take the elevator,” said the man, “and ask for Mr. White. Perhaps he’ll be kinder to you than he was to me,” he added grimly.

Long after the big building had swallowed up Son, the man stood outside, motionless except for his eyes.

Meanwhile Son was having difficulty with the elevator man, a man of no understanding.

“Aw! Go home to your Ma,” said this individual. “You don’t want Mr. White.”

“Yes, I do,” said Son, flushing. He was not accustomed to being circumvented except

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by his nurse, and to her piling up of reasons why he should not do what he wanted, he systematically turned a deaf ear and went ahead.

Providentially a grown-up passenger entered the elevator at this juncture and the discussion ended. The passenger getting out on the tenth floor, the man deposited Son on the eleventh, slid open the door, and closed it unceremoniously behind him.

The hour was somewhat late, and a burly Irishwoman was on her knees cleaning up the day's grime in the fireproof hall.

“Is Mr. White here?” said Son, a little timidly for him.

“Sure and he is, you blessed lamb,” was the hearty response. “Workin’ after time, and busy as a bee. It’s him that stays late every day. Shtepp this way.” She hustled to her feet and opened the door with a soapy hand.

Son found himself in a big office full of typewriters, one or two of which were still clicking busily.

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“I want to see Mr. White,” he said to a young lady with her hat and coat on, who seemed to be just going out. The young lady was in a hurry, called him “dear” vaguely, waved her hand toward the inner offices, on which names were printed in big letters, and went her way.

Son stood still and spelled out three names. Then he began on a fourth. To his great joy it was WHITE. He stepped up boldly to a desk where sat a young man doing nothing.

“I want to go in there,” he said.

“Mr. White’s gone home,” was the careless answer.

“No, he hasn’t,” said Son. “He’s in there. The woman said so.”

“Oh! Well, maybe he is,” said the young man, not unkindly, “but he is busy. You must send in your name if you want him. Here, Tom! take this — this kid’s name in to Mr. White.”

Tom came up grinning. Son brightened. Here was a boy — many sizes larger than himself, to be sure, but a boy for all that.

“Son”

“Name, please,” said the boy in a businesslike manner, producing a bit of yellow paper, and taking a pencil from behind his ear.

“Charles Warren,” said Son distinctly.

The boy scrawled it down and knocked at the much desired door, behind which he disappeared, shutting it with precision. In an instant he emerged, grinning again. He had lost a front tooth (playing baseball, Son supposed), but that in no way detracted from the geniality of his expression. Son admired him.

“He says,” drawled the boy, “that MISTER Warren is to come in. ‘Show him in at once!’ he says.”

Son’s bosom swelled. Proudly he approached the door. “I can go alone,” he said with dignity.

“Oh, all right, Mister Warren,” said the boy, replacing his pencil and winking at someone behind.

Son opened the door and shut it again carefully, just as he had seen the office boy

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do. He saw three windows, and beyond, the pink light of the winter sunset. He loved pink light, and had often wanted to write poetry about it, only no poetry could be as beautiful as the light itself. He had time to think of this, for the old gentleman at the desk had not yet lifted his eyes from the papers over which he was bending.

“Come in, Charley,” said the old gentleman, hearing the click of the door, “I’ve been expecting a visit from you. On the whole it’s selling as well as we could expect at this time of year.”

Receiving no reply, he at last raised his eyes. There, in the middle of his Axminster rug, motionless, stood Son.

“Bless my soul!” said the old gentleman. His quiet dignity had deserted him. He appeared thoroughly flustered. “I—you—there’s some mistake. They told me—”

Son approached. The pink light was on his face, on the rug, even on the stern features of Chief Justice Shaw looking down from the wall. Verily they seemed to smile.

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“Are you a printing man?” inquired Son, standing beside the desk.

“I—yes, yes, I am, surely I am,” said Mr. White. “What—can I do for you?”

“Please print my book,” said Son. “I want lots of money.”

Mr. White spent a long minute looking at Son. Everybody did that; so he was quite accustomed to it and did not mind. He wrinkled his nose a little bit under the scrutiny, and then, remembering that his nurse had told him never to do it, straightened it out again.

“Money?” said Mr. White, finally seeming to recover his equanimity in some slight degree. “Now, what for?”

Son knit his brows and tried to think it all out before speaking. Bits of fairy tales came back to him and helped him in his expression.

“There’s a great, big monster over the house,” he said slowly. “No, not monster,” he corrected himself, “but I think it begins with ‘M.’ It has wings. I dreamed about it. But if we give it money, it will go away.”

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There was a moment's silence. A blue veined hand, with a gold ring on it, stole out softly and drew Son so gently that he hardly noticed it onto a welcoming knee. Then the hand deftly removed Son's overcoat, after which it drew off his mittens, and presently busied itself with opening a large gold watch.

“Do you want to see the jewels in it?” said Mr. White. “Look, how many! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.”

Son, for delicious uncounted moments, lost himself in contemplation of the delicate mechanism of the wheels. Then Mr. White said, as if continuing a conversation:

“An unpleasant monster it must have been too, or one would naturally not have dreamed of it. What did you say its name was?”

“Oh, *I* remember now,” replied Son brightly. “It was a mortgage. Did you speak?” he added, looking up. But Mr. White did not appear to have said anything; so he continued, “And we might all have to go away — away from New York.”

“Son”

“On account of the mortgage?” said Mr. White quickly.

“N-o,” said Son, “I don’t *think* so. But Mother *couldn’t* walk.”

“Why not?”

“She couldn’t,” repeated Son with conviction. “She has to have the motor. She would be so tired.”

Then his eye fell on his book, which was lying beside his cap and mittens on the desk.

“Shall I show it to you?” he said eagerly.

“Presently,” said Mr. White.

He was going to ask more questions. The pink light had all gone, and Son was beginning to feel empty in his stomach.

“Is your father tired too?”

“I didn’t say Mother *was* tired,” explained Son patiently, “I said she *would* be tired. Father is tired sometimes. And he hasn’t time to work as much as me.”

“When do you work?”

Son laughed at this funny question. “In bed in the morning, before Mathilde comes in—and before lunch, after school—and

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after lunch till I go out — and — oh, a long time when I come in, before supper — and after supper, when Baby has gone to bed, because she bothers — she’s so little.”

“And in bed you dream of mortgages,” said Mr. White.

“That was after I went to sleep,” said Son. “*Before* I sleep, I make poetry.”

Mr. White asked for the poetry, and Son, for the second time that day, repeated it all, after which they went through the book from cover to cover. Some one came in and touched the electric button and went away again. It had grown quite dark.

“I’ve got to go home,” said Son suddenly.

“I’ll go too, and talk to your father about the book,” said Mr. White.

Son’s head swam. For a moment he forgot money, mortgage, and motor, and saw his precious book multiplied by unknown quantities. Together they fell miles in the elevator, and together were tucked into the great red Mercedes that buzzed below and kept herself from freezing.

“Son”

“You won’t be cold,” said Mr. White solicitously, looking for Son among the furs.

“Oh no!” cried a muffled voice delightedly. “Why, this is *lots* bigger than ours!”

“It’s to keep you from getting tired,” said Mr. White.

“I’m never tired,” answered Son.

Now this could not have been strictly true, else how did the lamps wink and wink so, and how did Son seem to be missing so much that he wanted to see, while every minute or two he knew that an arm was round him, cuddling him close, and in the intervening minutes he knew nothing at all?

Son’s disordered house presented a strange appearance, for the shades had not been drawn on the entrance floor, and the windows, with lights behind, were like eyes peering into the night. The bell was answered by the kitchen maid without her apron on. Upstairs in the library sat Mother, clad in her morning walking suit, her pretty hair disarranged under her hat, no veil on, and both hands over her eyes. Father was standing before the cold ashes of

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a past fire in an attitude of warming himself. Neither was speaking.

Suddenly upon the threshold of this silent room appeared the erect figure of an old man with a little child in his arms.

Mother lifted her eyes first, and every vestige of color left her face. Son's head drooped over Mr. White's arm; one little hand hung down in utter relaxation.

Father looked, and stifled a cry as he saw a warning finger.

“Hush!” whispered Mr. White.

Father and Mother, trembling, met each other's eyes. The reaction was too great. They came together, and clung tight, with closed eyes.

Then Mother disengaged herself, walked over, and mutely held out her arms. Mr. White shook his head. “It might disturb him,” he breathed. “I'll carry him up myself.”

It was a silent procession that climbed up to Son's little room, and still a silent one that made its way down again.

“Son”

“Now I’m going to talk to *you*,” said Mr. White.

Father and Mother hung down their heads, like children expecting to be scolded. No one sat down.

“He came to me,” began Mr. White slowly, “no matter how. That’s another story. He was carrying on his shoulders mortgage and what not, the whole burden of your imaginary difficulties. You, Charley, and you too, Maud, piled it all on. You carried on your fruitless discussion before his sensitive ears. You made his heart beat faster at your silly words.”

Father and Mother were listening now, no longer like children, but like prisoners arraigned at a bar of justice.

The Judge looked sternly from one to the other, and his face did not soften.

“I have known you all my life, you two, and that gives me the right to speak. Your father, Charley, — my friend, — gave you his abilities, every one of them, and what have you done with them? You’ve passed them on to your son, thank the Lord, but *that’s all*.

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A little writing, a little law practice, a great deal of exercise, and a lot of grumbling. And you, Maud,—you married him. Have you stimulated him? Have you tried to bring out what was in him? Or have you hung around his neck like a stone, with your laziness, your extravagance, your lack of interest in his career, and your craving for luxuries? Why, if I had a boy like that,”—his voice trembled, as he turned toward Father,—“I’d work my fingers to the bone if necessary, and with a song in my heart all day long. Since your marriage I’ve seen you only in the publishing line, Charley. I haven’t been in your home, for from what I’d heard I felt that we’d have no meeting ground there. I haven’t known your children. You never told me! The boy didn’t count much. You passed him over lightly, like everything else. Why, the very conductor, the loafer on the street, the office boy, appreciate him more than you! When I think of it”—his voice trembling again—“He wanted money. Lots of it, mind you. He wanted his book printed. Because

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his Mother couldn't walk — she had to have a motor. Maud! Maud! If *I* were his mother, I'd be willing to walk till there were no shoes left on my feet, thanking my God all the time for the luxury of such a boy.”

There was a deep silence after Mr. White had ceased. Mother was not crying. She had lifted her head, and Father, looking at her, saw a resemblance to Son. Then she smiled, and the tension snapped.

The Judge had suspended sentence, and was standing between his prisoners, a hand on the shoulder of each.

JIM

JIM



SON, with sinking heart, looked for the fiftieth time up and down the driveway, — Jim was not there. He had not been there for a week.

The grass was a delicate green, little crocuses dotted it here and there, shrubs had begun to be painted a faint yellow, but the glory had gone out of the Spring, — Jim was not there.

Son did not care for horses in general, but Jim's horse he had seen with Jim's eyes. He knew every proud motion, every curve of neck and swing of tail, every graceful lift of foot and dainty planting of hoof. He marvelled to see a horse of such bigness handle himself so easily. It took a big horse to carry Jim, big Jim. And Jim was not there.

Son, lost in thought, wandered about the Mall by himself. His friends, after repeated

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efforts at inducing sociability, had left him and gone off to their own pursuits. Mathilde, generally watchful, was deep in conversation with a “garçon de mon pays.”

Son, very melancholy and not so much as seeing his little furry friends who rushed hither and thither, passionately intent upon squirrel business, walked along slowly. Presently he came to a full stop.

Now Son was quite accustomed, being a city boy, to seeing men on benches in the full sunlight of a Saturday morning. But in this particular man, whose back was turned toward him, he discerned something that made him vaguely uneasy.

Quietly attentive, he observed all that he could see of the man. His head was bowed, his shoulders drooped. They were big shoulders, but they looked sloping.

Son left the main walk, and with footsteps that were now sharply pattering, soon reached the side path where the man sat on his bench. His toes danced, and he skipped a little, uttering a tiny squeal, as he sometimes did

Jim

when joy was too great to be entirely controlled.

Buttonless, splendorless, horseless, — what matter! It was Jim. Curiously he seemed to be asleep. How to wake him?

“Jim!” he cried.

No answer.

“Jim!” again louder.

No reply.

Son stood puzzled. Then inspiration came to him. He had an accomplishment, practised faithfully to amuse Baby, who was sporty.

There was a long inquiring whinny.

And Jim heard. If his sleep had been that which melts into death, that sound would have brought him back. He did not open his eyes, but he stirred, and put out a hand gropingly.

“All right, Don,” he called in his voice like a deep-toned organ, — “all right, old boy! I’m here!”

Then his heavy eyelids lifted slowly.

Son, a little ashamed of his ruse, but with

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all the love of his bursting heart in his face, smiled up at him. Now Jim's face was red enough, but at this moment a deeper flush was beginning at yesterday's collar and mounting slowly to the roots of his hair.

“Go away, Son,” he muttered. “Please go away.”

Then he saw Son's face quiver. With a groan Jim buried his face in his hands.

“Please,” he repeated huskily.

And Son went without another word or look.

“I can't imagine what is the matter with Son,” said Mother.

Father paused, shaving-brush in hand, and came in from his dressing-room.

“He isn't well?” he inquired sharply.

“Oh, no!” reassured Mother, — “not ill, but listless. Why, to-night he was sitting after supper, *doing nothing*. Baby wanted him to sing to her and he said, ‘No, darling, not to-night.’ So *I* sang, but she didn't like it half so well.”

Jim

There was a new note in the voices of Father and Mother when they were speaking about Son. They wanted so much to understand. But it would take years to pick up all the threads. And Son had been used for so long to thinking everything out all alone. He was doing it now, in bed, and he felt that they could not help him. No one could help him, for he had hurt his dearest friend.

Son's little body was full of electric wires; he clenched his hands and trembled all over.

"He thought it was Don," said Son over and over. "And it was really me. He put out his hand — and Don wasn't there. And he was *so disappointed*." Son buried his face in the pillows. He could not bear to think any more.

In the morning with the sun filtering in through the shutters, last night's burden came back and placed itself on his shoulders. But daylight helped, and Son resolutely put down the grief that unfitted him for action. Something must be done.

Every day that week Son went to the park

“Son”

full of hope, and every day came home with his hope unfulfilled. On Sunday afternoon he took a walk with Father. With his little hand in Father's big one, and cheerful conversation going on all the time, Son felt happier than he had for many a day. He liked to hear the swish of spring dresses, to see the heavy sunlight dropping down on the houses, to watch the puffing motors and the children in their best clothes, — all the little girls with bright flowers in their hats. He thought of Baby growing bigger and wearing such a hat. He wondered what flowers would look prettiest with her curls.

Suddenly Father felt his hand clutched. He looked down and could not believe his senses. Son's face was distorted with wrath, his eyes blazed.

“It's not his,” he panted, “*it's not his.*”

“Not his what? What isn't who's?” said Father hopelessly, following the direction of Son's wrathful gaze.

What he saw was a particularly showy police horse. His nostril glowed red, his

Jim

glossy neck curved proudly, his hoof pawed the asphalt with impatience not fully controlled. Yet he knew his duty, and was doing it, as became him, though this rider sat him impersonally, encouraging neither by pressure of leg nor whispered word. The policeman's buttons gleamed in the sunlight; it was reflected, too, in the horse's highly polished bits.

Before Father could move, right into the midst of the Sunday crowd who, at a signal from the policeman, were crossing the Avenue, as if shot out of a catapult, darted Son — Son, who was afraid of horses; Son, who could not be induced to ride; Son, who never of his own volition went near the stable. And now he was standing a quarter of an inch away from this great beast, holding out two supplicating little hands. Before Father could follow and grab him, before the policeman had had time to realize what was going on, a veined neck was gently lowered, and after one sniff a cold muzzle thrust into the warm waiting palms. The alien policeman smiled.

“Son”

“The horse knows him, sure,” he said to Father, whose big arms were by this time encircling Son.

“Come on, old man,” whispered Father, “everybody’s looking.” Son had been quite unconscious of this, and cared not at all, but he understood that grown-up people disapproved of scenes, and so suffered himself to be led away and lost in the throng.

Father looked down on the figure at his side, and it occurred to him that Son was very little. But he knew that the small heart was full of emotions that he did not understand, and very humbly his thoughts melted into a sort of prayer that he might never thrust rude fingers among those delicately tuned strings. He listened for the outburst that he knew would come, for Son’s chest was heaving.

“It was Don,” said Son.

Father did not catch what was said. Son had a habit of forgetting the difference in size, and speaking without turning his head. Thus, many times, on their walks, conversation had halted between them, Son’s words

Jim

being carried away on the breeze. Father remembered this and felt that the loss had been his. So he bent his shoulders and said "What?" patiently.

"It was *Don*," repeated Son, lifting his eyes full of misery. "Jim's Don — Jim's — Jim's — *Jim's*!"

"Who's Jim?" inquired Father.

"*Jim*!" said Son, smiling through his tears. He thought it very funny that Father did not know. Then he explained the whole situation as he understood it, painting in the blackest colors his own fraud and perfidy.

Father's education was progressing, though he lacked the imagination to fill in the meagre outlines of Son's story, — to realize the bitterness of self-reproach, the dark nights of, despair. But he knew that Son cared very much; and other things he suspected, that Son did not. Therefore his suggestion was practical.

"I'll see the Police Commissioner tomorrow," he said. "He's a friend of mine, and I'll find out all about it."

“Son”

Son's heart leaped. He looked with envy upon this Father who to-morrow could, by himself, go to the down town of blessed memories and promise, where things happened at every moment; where sat kind publishers who not only printed the books of little boys, but showed them watches and took them home in automobiles, and where Police Commissioners stood ready to right the wrongs of cruelly treated Jims and bring them into their own again.

Son had once penetrated this magic region himself, only to be thrust back, kindly but firmly, into a humdrum existence of face-washing, school, and park airings.

He was at the front door when Father came in the next evening,—had waited an unconscionable time, with hopeful face pressed against the pane. Father held out both hands, and with Son at arm's length looked down at him anxiously.

“I'm afraid we can't do anything,” he said gravely. “Too bad, old man.”

Now Son had been sure that all would be

Jim

well. He had had no doubts. He forgot all his dignity, and burst into a storm of tears worthy of Baby in her most unreasonable moments. Nor could Father quiet him. Mathilde arrived, and made matters worse with her chatterings, and then came Mother, who led him upstairs, put everybody out, and undressed him herself, holding him in her arms until he sobbed himself to sleep, his hands clasped tight about her neck, so tight that they mingled dainty collar and soft hair in a regrettable tangle.

When the hands relaxed, and Mother ran down to her room, she found that even by hurrying she could not escape being twenty minutes late for dinner. Yet she did not murmur, though she was punctual, and hated hurrying about things, — which showed that Father was not the only one being educated.

“I couldn’t tell him,” said Father, with knit brows, when they were finally on their way. “And I couldn’t lie to him, could I?”

“No indeed,” said Mother, “not that. Never to *him*.”

“Son”

Father looked relieved.

“Reynolds couldn’t do anything,” he continued. “If it had been the first time, but it wasn’t. There was a long record, and the fellow’s behavior had been overlooked more than once. You see, he had three medals, and that helped him out. But there *must* be a limit. So he was dismissed. And since then he has not once reported for duty. Reynolds will have to dismiss him from the force.”

They arrived at their dinner, and their hostess, who had a penchant for literary men and who had not met Father before, was greatly disappointed in him. As for Mother, whom she had met once and had supposed charming, she found her dull. Decidedly they were an over-rated couple.

A day or two later, as Mother was preparing to rest after lunch, there was a knock at her door. There, her face one protest, stood Mathilde.

“’E no more want to go to de park,” she

Jim

began. "Every day 'e want to go to Fifteenint' Street."

"Let him," said Mother laconically, taking down her hair.

"Oui, Madame," murmured Mathilde disapprovingly. She did not know what had come over Mother, who had used to uphold her authority.

Mathilde was cross, but she went to Fifty-ninth Street. At least she did not have to drag Son along; he walked with alacrity.

Mother pondered, brush in hand, for some moments. Then she put up her hair again deftly. After which she spent twenty minutes at the telephone, which stood on a little table near at hand. She scrawled an address, ordered a taxicab, dressed hastily, and went in search of Son. He was not hard to find. There he was on Fifth Avenue at the familiar crossing, with Mathilde fussily feeling his ears and admonishing him to stamp his feet, for there was a cold wind blowing that day, and Spring had broken her promise.

Son, unheeding, had eyes for no one but

“Son”

Don. He did not see Mother until Mathilde poked him, and forgot to take off his cap as he had been taught. “*Quelles manières!*” lamented Mathilde, pulling it from his head, and putting it on again with ungente affectionateness. He accepted reluctantly Mother’s invitation to get in beside her, but when she unfolded her plan his joy knew no bounds. Care left his face, and he chattered all the way over to the tenement house district, watching the swarms of children that had to be looked out for, the peanut venders, pushcart men, and peddlers. Then they stopped.

“You go up,” said Mother. “I’ll wait for you in the cab. It’s on the sixth floor, *back*. Remember—one, two, three, four, five, six—and *back!*”

“One,” counted Son. “Two” breathlessly. When he got to six he was speechless, so great had been his haste. “Back,” he told himself, and knocked at the door.

“Come in,” said a woman’s voice.

Son entered, and, being alone, remembered

Jim

his manners. He took off his cap, and his eyes swept the room. Jim was not there. But at least he was in communication. He could give a message.

"Is this Jim's house?" he asked politely.

"Yes," answered the woman with curt surprise. "I suppose it is."

Neither tone nor face was prepossessing, but Son was not observing in such matters. To him the woman seemed very nice. She had on a white apron that crinkled when she moved, and the room smelt of soap.

"Oh, will you tell him," he said, getting his breath—"that I thought he'd *know* it was only me?—And I didn't want him to think it was Don, really—but I couldn't wake him up any other way."

The woman looked genuinely puzzled.

"I'm *so sorry*," Son continued, his remorse all coming back to him. "And I *wish* I could see him. Where is he?"

There was a short pause. Then, "I don't know," answered the woman grimly.

"But he *will* be in!" cried Son. "He's

“Son”

got to come in for his supper, hasn't he?”

Jim's wife looked about the room. She had made no preparation for supper. The stove was cold.

“He may,” she said slowly. “And he may not.”

“Oh, yes, he will!” Son reassured her. “Everybody has to have supper. He'll come!”

The woman made no rejoinder, and the conversation flagged. Then Son said, brightening:

“Tell him I'm taking care of Don. I go down to the Plaza to see him every day. And sometimes I give him sugar.”

The woman began to understand.

“Is Don his horse?” she asked.

“Why, don't *you* know?” said Son. “Jim loves Don the best thing in all the world. He said, if he had a boy like me, he'd love *him* best. But he hasn't, — so he loves Don. Isn't Jim splendid?”

Mrs. Jim had not been accustomed to re-

Jim

garding her husband in this light. She considered herself a much abused woman. But this child seemed waiting for an answer.

"Splendid!" she said.

"He likes everything that *I* do," Son chatted on. "Sunsets and flowers — Oh, he *loves* flowers. He always shows them to me when they are first coming out. And he puts them on Don's bridle. And he hasn't got Don any more."

So Jim loved flowers — and sunsets. Jim's wife was thinking.

"I can't stay any longer," said Son. "Mother's waiting. But please — give my love to Jim."

"I will," promised the woman, and opened the door for him.

When he had gone, she remained for a long time quite motionless. Then she hurriedly put on her things and went out. In the street she made some purchases, and was coming back when her eye was caught by bright gleams of red, yellow, and purple mingled together in a mass bizarre but beau-

“Son”

tiful. The clouds of a gusty day had broken open, and on the narrow street gleamed the last rays of the westering sun.

“Sunsets — and flowers.”

“Buya! Buya!” called out the Italian flower-vender, seeing the woman pause before his cart. “Ecco, bella! bella! — Tenna centa!” His black eyes danced, and he held out enticingly a red geranium in a pot.

Jim’s wife, guilty and ashamed, hurried home, carrying the plant for which she had paid a dime that could ill be spared.

The stove was burning brightly when the man came in, and the kettle was on.

“I couldn’t make up my mind to go back,” he said hoarsely. “I just came in to tell you. I’m going out again.” Then in dismay his eye fell on a little dog that had been his companion for many hours. It had found him in the morning, and had followed him faithfully all that day. He had forgotten it coming upstairs, and its muddy footprints were already visible on the clean floor. “Get out!” he commanded roughly. “You ain’t wanted here.”

Jim

The little dog quivered and slunk towards the door, heart-broken at discovering harshness where he had scented only friendliness.

Then Jim's wife made her supreme effort.

"He can stay," she said. "Here, doggie, doggie!"

Jim spent many minutes in begging his little friend's pardon and winning back his confidence. By the time he had accomplished this and had coaxed the little beast onto his knee, supper was ready. Jim drank a great deal of fragrant coffee, which steadied his nerves and brought the light back to his eyes. The food was very good, and he ate heartily. Then he lighted his pipe, and sat smoking in silence. Presently he noticed the red geranium in the window. Jim always noticed things. He looked slowly from plant to wife, from wife to plant. Then he got up, put the dog gently down in his chair, hesitated, and went over to where she stood, wiping dishes.

"Mary," he said, and his voice trembled.

“Son”

It sounded like an organ again. “Mary — What’s come over you?”

“It’s the little boy,” she answered simply. “He was here.”

“Oh,” said Jim, “*I* see. — Son.”

The next afternoon, when Son arrived at his self-appointed post, some one who had been watching for him drew back quickly into the shadow of a building. It was Jim. Shaved, with his hair cut, and with the whites of his eyes so clear that they looked blue, he was pleasant to look upon, even in civilian’s clothes. Presently he crept out part way from his hiding-place and waited.

Son had been sternly keeping the usurper under observation, watching for any sign of inconsiderateness toward Don. Letting his gaze wander for a moment, he *saw*, and with a shout, terrific for one of his size, made a rush for Jim. All the bystanders smiled, but Jim’s eyes were like bottomless wells as he lifted Son in his arms.

“I didn’t know,” whispered Son, half sobbing, “that you’d think it was Don. —

Jim

Oh, Jim! That man *stole* him! Why don't you take Don back when he isn't looking? Jim! *He isn't looking now!*"

Son was trembling with excitement. Jim looked. The policeman had in fact dismounted and with his back to Don, who stood like a horse of bronze in the sunlight, was engaged in regulating a particularly congested bit of traffic.

The words were hardly out of Son's mouth before he was set down quickly, and Jim — the great, the splendid Jim — had shot into the street, flung himself into the saddle, and dashed madly down the avenue.

"He's got him!" shrieked Son. "Mathilde! Jim's got Don!"

Mathilde stood quite still and white, both hands over her eyes; then, very gently for her, she took Son home.

She had seen what Son had been too absorbed to see, what Jim had seen with those eyes of his that were so clear to-day. And she dared not wait for the outcome.

While Son had been in Jim's arms, down

“Son”

the avenue, swaying fearfully, was coming a runabout drawn by a pair of maddened trotters. The reins were in the hands of an old man, who with set face held them in the pitiful grip of threescore years and ten. Jim caught the gleam of white hair for one dreadful flash. Vehicles scattered to right and left, somehow clearing a path. But ahead—one block, two blocks—Jim didn't know—was a huge truck, headed down town. The driver, unconscious of the confusion and shouting, kept on his way.

In mid-gallop Jim leaned over and whispered in Don's ear. Don was gaining; he was abreast of the insane horses; the three were going neck and neck—Don was ahead—and Jim was off—down—on his feet, in front—had seized a rein in each iron hand—was swept under, never relaxing his hold—Oh, blessed weight of Jim! Big Jim! They were slowing up—they were standing still—and in the nick of time. Don was standing too, waiting for orders.

“All right, sir?” said Jim, pushing through

Jim

the crowd and looking anxiously at his old man.

Then, because he was so embarrassed by the things the latter had begun to say to him, he muttered an excuse, swung himself once more into the saddle, and headed up town.

"I'm sorry, Jack," he said heartily to his fellow officer when he had reached Fifty-ninth Street, "but I didn't have time to give you the chance. Here's your horse."

"Not on your life, Jim!" said the other. "I guess I can walk until they find me another nag."

But Jim had already dismounted and, laying his hand for a moment on the shoulder of his fellow, he went away.

Poor Son! The excitement of that afternoon had proved too much for him, and it was three long days before he went to the park. When the afternoon came, he could hardly bear the joyful anticipation. This time there was to be no disappointment.

“Son”

There they were, on the accustomed drive—
Don and Jim.

The instant Jim caught sight of Son, he
swung himself off.

“Want to ride?” he suggested

“No, thank you,” said Son. “It’s a high
up.”

“So it is,” agreed Jim. “Too high.
Come, and I’ll show you where there are lots
of violets coming out.”

“Oh, good!” cried Son, clapping his
hands. “Violets are my favorite flowers.
What are yours?”

“Mine are red geraniums,” said Jim.

THE LITTLE CLOWN

THE LITTLE CLOWN



IT was the kind of March day that makes one feel as though the whole world had come alive. The trees were swishing on upper Fifth Avenue, each twig glittering in the brazen sunlight and seeming to call out, "I'm going to bud by and by! Yes, I am!"

The sky was so blue that if one thought of clouds at all it was as things he might have read about, perhaps, but could never by any possibility have seen. No cloud would dare show its face on such a sky!

Not on this day! For Son was going to the circus. Father was taking him, and so hastily had Son gulped down his mid-day meal that there was plenty of time for this walk to the Plaza with lungs full of the riotous holiday air, before turning east and boarding a street car, fit conveyance for unaccompanied males. Son felt as though his chest

“Son”

expanded several inches by the time he was holding on to the seam of Father's overcoat, wondering whether the proud day would ever come when *he* should be tall enough to hang by a strap.

Such of his fellow passengers as he could see through small gaps between skirts, coats, and bundles, filled him with pity. That fat woman who looked as though she was thinking of nothing at all, — how her face would kindle could Son whisper in her ear, “Come with me to the circus”! And that boy, wedged in between the two old men — he was not going! If Son could have invited *him*, his jaws must have snapped, ceasing instantly their uninterested and continuous gum-chewing. All, old and young, proceeded phlegmatically toward their various destinations, unconscious, apparently, that there are moments in life to make hearts pound and pulses quicken.

Father's eyes travelled from Son's small set face to the tiny white sailor-trousered legs below his pea-jacket. “I wonder whether

The Little Clown

he is enjoying himself," he thought. Aloud he said, "Come along!" for they were about to arrive at their destination. What inept remarks grown-up people made! Son shot ahead, prevented only by the conductor's restraining hand from hurling himself to the sidewalk before the car had stopped.

In with a crowd, past the taker of tickets, and Son's identity was lost in an immensity so vast as to daze him. If there were empty spaces in the rows of seats that rose tier on tier toward the great dome, he did not see them. The amphitheatre appeared to him to be packed with a waiting multitude,—faces without features, as he was accustomed to draw them when he sat down with pad and pencil, feeling that as he could not convey the concrete impression he desired, he could suggest it by a blank that allowed the imagination scope. His feet fell soundless on the tan bark. Down from a great height came dim and filtered sunbeams, and millions of tiny particles of dust, revolving, rose up to meet them.

“Son”

There was an all-pervading smell that, though not pleasing, was inspiring to Son inasmuch as it suggested savagery and the jungle. He thought regretfully of the sign they had just passed, with a painted hand pointing. Though he could not read, it said to him as plain as day, “This way to the animals.” It would have been good to hear a few comfortable roars! Somewhere before he had known this sensation of being swallowed up—it was coming back to him with a sinking of the heart—those nights of fever last year, when church bells had tolled all the time, and he had seen at the end of immense distances something very Big, which came nearer and nearer, and just as it was going to close down on him, dwindled fearfully into something Tiny.

A blatant sound smote his ear, putting introspection to flight—the band, whose efforts, just begun, were to continue without let up the whole performance through. The ceiling lowered itself, the tiers of seats drew together a little, and as things began to assume

The Little Clown

more natural proportions Son ceased to feel so small.

He could have screamed in terror when a smiling official took their checks and slouched ahead of them toward the boxes, for the way led right through the arena. To be sure, it was still empty, but at any moment now it might be brilliant with panoplied chargers ridden by glittering ladies — he clung to Father's hand, expecting the thunder of oncoming chariots, which should grind him to powder beneath their golden wheels.

"In here," the official's voice drawled, putting an end to his fears.

Father had bought two seats in a box, and the girl with the green feather in her hat, who with her escort had arrived before them and was installed in front, obligingly moved back.

"Ain't he cute?" she said.

Son looked intently, but did not perceive anything. How suggestive of glories to come was the empty arena! For years after this day, the smell of tan-bark carried with it for him a hush of anticipation.

“Son”

Ah! At last!

Through slow-swung doors the procession was coming. Son had no sooner adjusted his mind to elephants, whose deliberate tread of huge feet moved all the little wrinkles in their skins, than they turned into ponies pattering along with eyes askance and much shaking of silky manes; these again into men—real men whom Son could have touched, so close was he—Phœnician with blue-black curling beard succeeding dusky African, mounted guard in clinking armor giving place to trumpeter who puffed out his cheeks as though preparing to blow great blasts on his trumpet, from which, however, no sound came.

Son had looked at details until his head swam and things had begun to run together before his eyes, like the bits of mercury he had collected when the nursery thermometer broke. He put his hands before his eyes for a minute and made everything dark save for tiny red stars and mysterious flashes; then he took them down, and lo! he could grasp

The Little Clown

the pageant as a whole. Elephants existed as elephants no longer, men were not individuals any more, but each formed part of a marvellous moving picture of the East, revealed to him in undreamed-of splendor.

Slowly the great procession drew itself out, flashing and glimmering like the coils of a monstrous snake. Barbaric colors smote the sight no longer as purple, silver, green, and gold, but blended in one harmonious whole.

Son's gaze fixed itself on the door which was beginning to engulf the glittering monster that writhed slowly through. He longed to penetrate the enchanted region beyond, where sentinels paced forever, archers shot at a mark, dancing girls swayed, and pages sat looking on, elbows on velvet knees.

"How do you like it?" Father asked. It was against his will that his voice habitually softened in speaking to Son, for he had theories, and one of them was that a boy should be handled without gloves. When *he* was six, he was leader of a gang, and used to play baseball in the street. At least

“Son”

he remembered distinctly the leadership and the ball games — and six was about the right age, he thought.

“Here come the elephants,” he went on without waiting for an answer to his question.

Son determined to watch only one ring. Yet his eyes turned from middle to right, back to middle and to left, so afraid was he of losing some wonderful feat of these extraordinary pachyderms.

No sooner had the elephants disappeared than uniformed attendants busied themselves on the run to set everything in order. Son marvelled at their zeal. He had never seen housework done in such fashion at home. He thought of the new useful man, who never cleaned the windows, though it had been thoroughly understood, Mother said, that this was expected of him — and no wonder! What uninspiring toil, the polishing of windows! Put him *here*, in a green suit with red epaulettes, and he would soon show what stuff he was made of.

Son did not tire as the afternoon wore on.

The Little Clown

Father's offers of peanuts and popcorn tempted him sorely, but in matters pertaining to the stomach he had long since found it wise to take his orders from Mother. He had watched the horses faithfully, in order to be able to repeat to Baby a list of their performances down to the last detail, well knowing that for this part of the show she would hold him strictly to account.

To Father's disappointment he had hardly noticed the trapeze performers at all. They hung and balanced, revolved and swung, at such a height above him as to seem remote as birds in a summer sky. He was at the age when one looks at things nearer—the buttercup at one's feet rather than the mountains above it. There were so many near things to look at! Little dogs that lay down and died, coming to life again at the next instant and trotting cheerfully on their way with uplifted tails; seals that flopped wetly by methods known only to themselves onto the backs of horses, where they hung without falling off, awaiting confidently the delicious

“Son”

morsel that inevitably followed a successful achievement; boys not much bigger than Son, who turned handsprings and cartwheels without number as though theirs were the only natural method of getting over the ground; pigeons, who settled themselves on a charger's head as if they had never heard of a barn roof for roosting purposes.

It flashed through Son's dizzy brain that this was reality and things as he had known them before—dreams. He felt sure that had he brought with him their old fat Cocker-spaniel, over-indulged by a soft-hearted cook and snoring his existence away under the kitchen stove, and turned him loose among these creatures, he likewise would have begun to perform, amid the admiring cheers of the spectators.

Son was delighted with the antics of the clowns. Just as he could listen without a tremor to any story of ogre and goblin, reeked it never so horribly of gore, so the horseplay of these Punchinellos come to life seemed to him the highest art.

The Little Clown

"There's a funny one!" came from the girl with the green feather. "Did you ever see such a get up?"

Son heartily agreed. The clown she meant was lithe and springy, and under an abbreviated ballet skirt his muscular legs pirouetted with no mean skill. He held coquettishly above his head a tiny pink parasol. "What a good time he's having!" thought Son, smiling. Just then his eyes caught those of a little clown who was passing by. They were gray, clear eyes, unspoiled by the painted lines about them. They met Son's squarely, with an open and pleasant look. He had, to be sure, a painted face with red blotches, a pair of baggy pantaloons, and the regulation peaked cap, but no art could have given him those thousand good-humored lines about a mouth made for kindness and laughter. That was pure nature. So attentively did he observe the play of his fellows, following their hits with many an impulsive gesture of appreciation, that before long he began to be the centre of attraction. The other clowns

“Son”

had been received good-naturedly, too, but everybody liked this one best.

Shuffling along in his wake came presently a great, lanky clown, who gazed solemnly into vacancy. Several feet away he halted, and extending deliberately a long thin arm, snapped the other's peaked cap from his head. It turned over and over like a live thing before it finally stopped and lay quiet a long way off. Loud laughter rang from the gallery. Son joined in, holding his sides until he caught sight of the little clown's face. He saw all the little lines of merriment about the mouth wiped out like figures on a slate. He saw the crow's feet around the eyes smooth themselves away. Slowly, one by one, the thousand delicate and elusive nothings that make a smile disappeared. Then he saw the mouth begin to droop ever so little at the corners. The expression was that of a small child bullied by a big one. The eyes were raised to the tormentor's great height, and then — why, the little clown *was crying*.

“Er hat mir minerr hat off ge-knocked!”

The Little Clown

he sobbed. "Oh, what shall I make? And out-ge-laughed to be from all people, — wie kommt das schwarz!"

That anyone should be made so unhappy in this place of delight was not to be borne. Son leaned far out over the rail and called beseechingly:

"Look! Oh, please look, dear little clown! Here's somebody who's not laughing!"

The band was playing very loud, and no one could hear the shaking tones — the clown least of all, for he was walking away with heavy feet and drooping shoulders toward the insulted hat.

The next half-hour was as full of misery for Son as the preceding ones had been of joy, for he had to see the wretched mummery repeated at least six times at different ranges of vision. It was not so bad while the two figures gesticulated like puppets of a Punch and Judy show, but when they came nearer, and he could once more see them as men and not as dolls, he could bear the strain no longer.

“Son”

For the seventh and last time the incident was about to be repeated, and directly in front of Son's box. Oh, the *poor* little clown! He was so confiding! And he had thought each time that his troubles were over, and had gone rejoicing on his way! He was a foreigner, too—just come over, probably, since he spoke so little English. That big fellow was a coward! Son wanted to run out and beat him with his hands. His sense of hospitality was outraged. Once more his heart stood still. The churl was creeping up behind the back of his unsuspecting mate; a stealthy arm was extended and—off blew the conical hat again. At the same instant a childish voice cried out firmly, determined to be heard this time:

“Never mind *him*, little clown! Here's a hat for you!”

Father, startled, saw Son holding out in both hands his little sailor cap of blue cloth.

“Son!” he began hastily. “Have you lost your —”

He stopped short, for the little clown some-

The Little Clown

how managed to tell him that it was all right. This would not have surprised his fellows, to whom Kent Von Hergberg was known as the quickest clown in the circus.

After a moment of surprise, not long enough for a little boy to notice, he had taken the cap out of the eager hands and was holding it as if it were some very precious and breakable thing. Next he came quite close to the box rail and stood with wistful chin uplifted toward Son. Then, as if remembering all of a sudden, he tossed the cap high in air with a joyous shout, so that the beautifully stamped letters, "U. S. S. Valiant" mingled in a whirl of gold, caught it, clapped it onto the top of his head, where it stuck no one knows how, and without so much as a "Thank you" danced off past the boxes and made the entire circuit of the arena before he disappeared behind the mysterious door. As for the big one, he followed at a respectful distance, skulking wofully. The conical cap was left unheeded where it had fallen, and was presently swept up by one

“Son”

of the attendants, who was rushing about assiduously with broom and dustpan.

Father, leading Son out with the crowd, was suddenly bumped into — quite unnecessarily, he thought.

“Excuse me, sir!” some one said.

He looked down, and there at his elbow was a small man in neat blue serge, smiling irresistibly and making signs.

“Here’s his cap — don’t let him know,” he whispered with a slight accent but in excellent English.

Father took it and slipped it into his pocket, with a glance at Son’s smooth bare head.

“Why does he let that child go around without a hat? So conspicuous!” he heard some one whisper in the street car, and he rather wished he had called a taxi. But to do Father justice, that was only because he was afraid Son would take cold.

He might have spared himself this anxiety. In Son’s exhilarated state catching cold was not in the realm of possibilities. He glowed

The Little Clown

all over. It was so irritating to have your hat knocked off! Only that week some boys had played that trick on *him*. Baby's nurse had said he mustn't mind. But he had minded! And that was only once, while the little clown, too small to defend himself, had been subjected to the indignity over and over. But now — never again!

The next day, Sunday, Son went to the park in the morning longing for fresh excitement. He forgot to play, and found himself gazing anxiously up and down the walks of the Mall, his glance stopping at every bench. It was absurd! He had never encountered a clown in the park. But, after all, why *shouldn't* one come there once in a while? He had seen Santa Claus plenty of times at Christmas standing soberly in the light of every day, shaking a tambourine or keeping guard over a toy chimney on a tripod, for pennies. Then why not a clown, on a spring Sunday, when the circus wasn't working, and there was nothing else for him to do?

Idling along with his hands in his pockets,

“Son”

Son's heart suddenly leaped into his mouth. Surely, behind that tree — that was he! He waited, confidently expecting him to creep out, shaking a playful finger. It took so long that Son could not endure the suspense, so he stole up softly on tiptoe, and clasping his hands about the venerable trunk, peered stealthily around it. Nothing was there. What he had seen moving was but the shadow of the branches that swayed in the breeze. He went home, and his heart was heavy with a sense of disillusion.

It was Mathilde's Sunday out, and he had looked forward to walking in the afternoon with Baby and her nurse, both persons of sense. He was going to tell them all about yesterday's horses. But when the time came, Baby seemed listless, and it was decreed that she must stay at home.

Son was sent back to the park with the housemaid, who had just given notice and was going away next week to be married. In unsocial mood she sought out an unfrequented corner of the ramble, and as the air

The Little Clown

was warm threw herself on a bench, opened a book she had brought with her, and was soon completely absorbed in a story suited to her state of mind. Son, left to his own devices, regarded her gravely for a moment, pondering on the unpleasant transformation wrought in even the most sane persons by falling in love. Then he wandered off. He hardly knew how far he went, still looking for a possible clown.

He ought not to have expected him in the morning! It was of a Sunday afternoon that clowns came to the park. Everybody came then! Weary mothers, with dragging feet and wan faces that yet had smiles for the babes in their arms; pinched children with greedy eyes spying out anything that was beginning to bud, looking about warily for "cops" before they snatched at the forbidden treasure; whole families of little ones unaccompanied, and holding each other by the hands for fear of getting separated, many looking, alas! as if they had been housed the whole winter through.

“Son”

Son was so glad that they were out at last ! Mathilde always grumbled at the park on such days, saying it was no place for *him*, but the more crowded it was, the better he liked it. It was good to see the tiniest ones sniffing the sweet air, and to hear them crow at the carriages and motors that went rolling by.

Son, trotting along, always keeping a sharp lookout, did not notice a small man coming toward him, evidently watching for some one too. This person, after spending a fruitless hour in the Mall, had sought out these restful by-paths because he was weary of so much humanity. When he caught sight of Son, his face lighted up in one flash of joy. But he drew back behind some bushes and bided his time.

It was tiresome work, this waiting for clowns who never came. And there was no one to play with. Son, with a little sigh, took his ball out of his pocket and began to throw it into the air and catch it again. He was not very skilful, and presently it slipped

The Little Clown

away and rolled a long distance down the walk. Here was the man's chance. He picked up the ball and made ready to toss it.

"Catch!" he said in an encouraging voice with pleasant inflection.

Son put out his hands, palms upward in nursery fashion — and missed.

"That's not the way," said the man, coming up. "Look! Like this!"

And in twenty minutes he had taught Son as much about ball-playing as even Father could have known in his gilded youth. It was a royal game they had.

"I can't do any more!" panted Son finally, rosy and laughing. So they changed to hopscotch, for which his accommodating pocket provided a piece of chalk.

Son burst into a peal of merriment when the man's turn came.

"You jump just like a kangaroo!" he cried. "*Doesn't* he?"

This remark was addressed to a group of Italian children who had come up, chattering like little monkeys, and were now standing in

“Son”

an admiring circle around the intrepid pair who had dared to make chalk marks on other ground than that set apart for such purposes. They smiled and nodded when Son appealed to them, their responsive faces full of pleasure. When Son sank down on a bench, followed by the man, and there was promise of no more amusement, they stood for an instant wide-eyed and then scampered off.

“*A rivederci!*” they called in their musical tones, waving back over their shoulders.

The confidence begun in play was increased by the meeting of eyes. Surely those were not the eyes of a stranger! Son was convinced that he had looked into them before. But where? When? He gave it up, and began at once to talk to this new friend on the subject nearest his heart. That a man so full of general information should know all about the circus seemed perfectly natural to him.

He learned what circus folk did on Tuesdays, — how they exchanged stories, sitting around in the big dressing-room on boxes

The Little Clown

and trunks; how sociable they were, and how kindly, and how they thrilled to the applause which was the breath of life to them. It was for this, he said, that the trapeze performers risked their lives cheerfully twice a day, and for this, too, that a mere boy made the high dive from the dome, well knowing the chances to be one in twenty that he would be killed before the year was out.

Of Son's clown he seemed reluctant to talk at first, merely vouchsafing the information that he had come from somewhere across the sea in a great big ship.

"Are you his friend?" Son asked.

"I may not be much of a *friend* to him," was the smiling answer, "but I know him about as well as anybody."

"Why did he come?" asked Son.

"Well, you see," answered the man, "laugh-making is his living, and he was afraid he might forget it over there."

"Was he unhappy?"

"Once upon a time," the man said, "he was the happiest little clown that ever lived.

“Son”

The very happiest! For he had a beautiful little wife.”

“Did she belong to the circus?” asked Son.

“Sure, she did!” replied the man, “and wore spangles and rode a white pony. But by and by she went away.”

“Went away!” Son was incredulous. “Did the clown go too?”

“No,” was the reply. “She left him something to take care of for her,” the man replied.

“The white pony!” guessed Son.

“Better than that,” said the man. Then, anxious to divert the conversation, “But he did keep the pony, and whenever he had time he used to go to the railroad station and buy a ticket and travel to the place where it was. He would walk miles through the country, and when he came to the field where he kept it turned out, he would stand for hours against the fence, watching it frisk about and whisk away the flies with its great, long tail.”

The Little Clown

"Did he bring them to America—the pony and the present the lady left?"

"No," said the man.

"Then he hadn't anything!" Son cried.

"Oh, yes," was the quick reply, "he had the spangled dress in his trunk!"

Then Son wanted to hear all about the big clown who would never dare bother the little one any more. So they talked on and on.

Squirrels scolded them occasionally, looking down from the trees with bright, inquisitive eyes, and birds hopped up quite close to their feet, flew off, hoped they had been mistaken in thinking that the two on the bench had nothing to feed them with, and came back to try again.

They were interrupted at last by the delinquent housemaid, for whom Son had unwittingly provided a very unpleasant half-hour. She had continued her reading until the last page of the book, had suppressed a desire to go back to the beginning without looking up, and, having regretfully closed the enticing

“Son”

volume, had glanced about vaguely for her charge.

There he was at length, in absorbed conversation with a little, strange man, — and no harm done. So great was her relief that when the man arose, uttered a few whispered words in her ear, took Son's hand in his and started toward home with him, she was quite ready to follow meekly a few yards behind.

Son did not notice whither he was being led, nor how the walks had begun to clear themselves of children, all hurrying home eastward through the streets. For his mind was elsewhere, among the gay scenes of the day before, and he was learning that clowns must keep very close out of working hours, else no one would buy tickets to see them in the show.

“Why, here we are!” said Son, waking up in front of his own home.

When the door was opened in response to their ring, Father was in the front hall taking off his hat and coat.

The Little Clown

Son was not surprised at the cordial greeting between the two men. It was right that they should like each other — these two, both of whom were so worthy, and whom chance had brought together.

“ Won’t you come in ? ” urged Father.

The man shook his head.

“ No, sir, thank you,” he said. “ I hope you did not mind,” he added anxiously, lowering his voice, “ my coming to the door with him. I was looking for him all the afternoon. And when I found him, I wanted to see where he lived, so that I could remember — after I went away.”

Father looked at him curiously for a long minute.

“ Why don’t you go into vaudeville ? ” he then asked abruptly. “ It pays better ! I could help you to an opening ! ”

The man only smiled.

“ You’re very kind,” he presently said, “ but I’d rather stick to the circus. I was bringing *my* boy up for it. He was just *his* age. I was going to make a clown of him.

“Son”

And as for the money,” he added, “I don’t need so much — just for myself.”

Father said no more, but wrung his hand.

Then the man took a long look at Son, as if to stamp on his memory every feature.

“Good-bye!” he said.

“Oh, please,” cried Son, “give my love to the Clown.”

The man hesitated, then he stooped down. He did not have to stoop very much.

“Would you,” he asked diffidently, “would you give me something else for him?”

Son put up his arms and closed them tight around the man’s neck.

“Give him *that!*” he said.

All night long Son dreamed of clowns — clowns in hostile countries, among unfriendly inhabitants, — clowns in dire peril, who were rescued by little boys, and whose faces, when they bent over to thank their protectors, became the faces of the little boys’ mothers.

TOM

TOM



SON was out in the open, looking up at the low rambling house that pressed the turf as he was pressing it with his foot. On the east the sea, — the sea on the west, — everywhere, always, that riotous sheet of dancing blue, — and melting into it a green so sober that it checked gently the soaring of his spirit and brought it home again.

That there were rocks, he knew, for sometimes in less radiant mood he had gone down to them, seeking the treasures that little boys love, and stopping in the midst of his industry to watch them white with spray or pink in the sunset. But this was morning! And they didn't belong to such a morning as this. The trees did, — they belonged always. They were big and protecting, and Son had only to stand under their great branches to let the heavy sunlight drop down on him in flecks of gold.

“Son”

If there had been any one observing Son at that moment, he might have envied the careless joys of childhood digging the toes of its boots into such a fragrant dewy carpet, — he would not have suspected that with Son mere joy of digging paled beside his delight in the living green. For none knew that this little boy, with the freckles on his nose, whose years by the calendar numbered seven, was really of no age at all, that he was as old as any heart that beat that could rhyme with the sound of the sea, as young as the blue-bell that had sprung up yesterday.

Father and Mother, appearing at this moment upon the terrace for their rather late breakfast, saw Son.

“Why do you suppose he stands around like that?” said Father.

“I don’t know,” Mother answered, pouring out the coffee; “he may be thinking.”

“Thinking!” replied Father with some scorn, and added dogmatically, “Boys don’t think at that age.”

Tom

"Very likely not," said Mother absently, looking about for spoons.

"Hello!" called Father, and Son came at once to kiss his parents good morning.

"Have you been down to the stable yet?" began Father diplomatically.

"No," said Son.

Father looked disappointed.

"I'll go now," Son said cheerfully, and ran off.

The stable was in charge of an elderly man who had been got cheap on account of a certain meagreness in his references, with long gaps which were not very well accounted for. Father had frowned over them for a long time in a state of indecision.

"But he has such a nice face!" Mother had said. "And the livery will just fit him. And he will be much more contented than a younger man, so far from the village. He is perfectly willing to mow the lawn, too, and black boots, and look after the furnace if we stay late in the Autumn. Of course he's Irish," she added a little regretfully, "but we

“Son”

never could get an Englishman who would mow the lawn.”

So Tom was engaged, and put in charge of a pair of horses hired from the village and of Baby's pony, Peter Pan.

This pony was the pride of the whole family, for Mother, having seen an advertisement in the *Sun* setting forth his virtues and the sorrow of those who on account of reverses had been obliged to part with him, had made her way to a stable somewhere near the river and bought him at sight, together with a governess-cart and russet harness.

Father had heaved a sigh of relief on seeing the new purchase, and had thought in secret that fate had been kind. For Peter was young and sound, and looked serviceable. The harness turned out to be machine made, and as it had to be replaced by a safer one the outfit had not come quite so cheap as Mother had thought. But that, after all, was a small matter. “It might have been so much worse,” reflected Father. “Now, if the pony had had a spavin . . .”

Tom

Mother was triumphant this Summer, for Tom, too, had turned out a treasure. He was up at dawn, and worked unceasingly all day. His only rest was during the hours when, in the livery which, after all, had needed a few alterations, and looking very neat and respectable, he was out with Baby and her nurse in the pony-cart. The hired pair Father generally drove himself.

When after a few weeks it appeared that Baby was not only holding the reins on her expeditions but was learning to handle them with the inborn instinct of the true sport, every one, from the fat laundress who stood behind the lattice watching, hands on hips, to Father and Mother themselves, was in a state of almost hysterical enthusiasm.

As for Son, he was swollen with vanity and pride. That people could write books or make up poetry did not seem to him remarkable. But any one who could handle a horse he regarded with respectful admiration. And that Baby — his own Baby, not yet four years old — was doing it every afternoon was

“Son”

wonderful beyond words. So, when Father was laughing one day over the receipt of a notice inviting him to make entries in the coming August horse-show, Son had cried out, “Let Baby drive Peter!”

Father and Mother had exchanged looks of silent astonishment, and had then responded with one voice, “Why not?”

And Son, to whom it did not seem to occur that he had work enough already, had entered heart and soul into the idea. Son knew, as he trotted toward the stable on this particular morning, just what Tom would be doing. He would be rubbing, rubbing, rubbing, and as he rubbed he would make a peculiar half-whistling, half-sighing sound. Son had thought this was meant to soothe the horses, until one day he heard Tom doing it as he bent over the lawn mower.

“Good morning, Tom!” said Son.

“Good morning, me lad,” said Tom.

“Isn’t it a beautiful day?” Son went on.

“Sure, it’s a foine day for horses,” responded Tom, “and the flies isn’t botherin’ thim at all.”

Tom

Son sighed. There was only one subject upon which one could converse with Tom. So they went over for the thousandth time their plans for the coming show.

It was at lunch that very day that the crash of Son's hopes came. They were, of course, talking of Baby.

"She hasn't a chance of any kind of a ribbon," Father said easily.

"Don't you suppose I know that?" retorted Mother, piqued at his assumption of her ignorance. Then she continued more amiably, "He's a pretty pony, though."

"Yes," Father said judicially, "but no action. Have you seen the Reynolds' pony, — the black one? *He* can step!"

"Oh, never mind," went on Mother. "We're only going into it for fun. Baby will look too sweet! And she won't know whether she gets a ribbon or not."

Thus carelessly did Mother thrust her little daughter into the class of incompetents.

Not know the difference! Son grew hot.

“Son”

But he said no word, and occupied himself with his potato.

The instant the meal was finished, Son went down to the stable. Tom was working on harness this time. Not the harness that had been rented with the village horses, but Peter's little russet one, which he handled delicately, pausing from time to time with his head on one side to determine whether the mountings shone enough.

Son watched him for some moments quietly. He hated to tell what he had heard, longing at the same time for sympathy. He knew nothing of the vicissitudes of Tom's life,—the long years of drifting and knocking about, so he could not realize the blessedness of the peace that had come to the gray-haired man through being anchored fast at last.

Poor Tom would not express himself in words, but with the work of his hands he could show his adoration of Baby, and did. Nothing was too good for her. And in the eyes of his love everything pertaining to her

Tom

expanded and grew. Thus he slaved for Father and Mother, merely because she owned them, and he had come to regard Peter, who served her, as the one pony in the world. Son's intuition told him enough of all this to make this moment very difficult. And it is not easy to put things just right when you are only seven.

"Tom," he said at last tentatively, "do you think Peter will get a ribbon?"

"Sure, I do," replied Tom with conviction. "It's the blue he'll get."

"Mother and Father don't think he's got action enough," burst out Son. There, — it was said, — and he had meant to do it so much more gradually.

"Oh!" said Tom. He had not thought of that. But now that it had been spoken of, his ideal pony had in a twinkling dissolved in thin air, and left in his stead a naked, change-ling Peter.

Tom emerged from his nightmare to see Son's anxious eyes on his face. Son had a way of waiting for an answer.

“Son”

“Action, is it?” blustered Tom feebly.
“Well, what if he ain’t?”

Then Son knew that Father and Mother had spoken truth. He went out thinking deeply.

Tom resumed his work, and his face looked quite old and ashen. But it seemed that he too was thinking, for toward night a mysterious smile began to play around his eyes and the corners of his mouth.

That evening at supper, Son said:

“Baby, if you shouldn’t get a blue ribbon, what color *would* you like?”

“Green,” answered Baby promptly.

And her nurse laughed, — for she was Irish, as well as Tom.

The afternoon had come. Father and Mother were going to the horse-show on a brake. Son was to follow in that anomalous conveyance known as a cutunder, that Baby might be kept as quiet as possible on the way over with Peter.

But when the brake, with much crunching of gravel, fussing about of grooms, and head

Tom

tossings of horses, had been brought to a standstill before the door, Mother's resplendent friend noticed Son standing gravely there to see the party off, and with a sudden impulse to make herself very agreeable, cried out:

"Why can't he come too?"

"Yes! Yes!" shouted all the other beautiful ladies and fine gentlemen, in chorus.

"Let him sit in front with you, Dick," said Mother's friend to her husband, trying to make her tone ungrudging; "he won't take up much room. I hope he won't be noisy," she added under her breath.

Son was swung up by the attentive grooms, to whom the gentleman gave a great many orders in a very loud voice, and sat as still as a mouse between the gentleman and the most beautiful young lady he had ever seen. Her cheeks were as red as roses, and she was clothed all in violet of the most delicate shades. When she moved she exhaled a pungent odor, also of violets. She put her arm about Son, giving him a little squeeze,

“Son”

and paid no further attention to him. The gentleman handled the reins with an easy skill that was marvellous to Son.

“Well, old sport,” he asked familiarly, looking down, “and how goes the world with you?”

Son did not know how to reply to this strange form of address. But it came to him quickly that the gentleman was probably not used to little boys, so he said cordially:

“Very well, thank you.”

And the gentleman looked at him again with a kindly glimmer in his little gray eyes, after which he asked Son quite solicitously whether he had room enough.

How dusty the road was! Son was glad that the great white swirls did not reach to their high perch, for it would have been such a pity to spoil the beautiful dress of the violet young lady. Their progress was necessarily slow, but the gentleman man manœuvred his four in and out among crawling vehicles of every description with a sureness born of long practice up and down New York’s great

Tom

thoroughfare. For he took his driving seriously, and who shall say he was not the better for it? Had fate denied him the wherewithal to follow out his destiny, and tried to make of him a doctor or a lawyer, how pitiable would have been the result! Each after his kind. And Son followed with unbounded admiration every twist and turn of his wrist, wondering most of all at sight of the long, thin lash that, fascinating as a live reptile, uncoiled itself, pricking with unerring aim first one leader and then the other, to be wound up again instantly without the minutest tangle. He doubted whether even Baby would be able to do it like that, when she should have a four of her own.

Baby! She would be coming soon. Son felt in his pocket, to make sure that something was there. Yes, there it was, all safe.

A sudden jar turned his thoughts. Some of the ladies screamed. Not Mother, — she never screamed. Almost obliterated by dust, a well-loaded cutunder had stopped short in the middle of the last hill before you came

“Son”

to the park, directly in front of the brake. The leaders, pulled sharply to the left, cleared it by a hair's breadth. The brake rocked, and its owner uttered forcible expletives in no gentle tone. The driver of the cutunder turned toward the party his round, humorous face.

“I can't help it, Mr. Jennings!” he pleaded. “There ain't no power on earth will make him go when he takes a notion not to. So long!”

And Son turned to see him, slumped down in his seat, the reins over the horse's back, wagon and occupants motionless and very much in the way of everybody.

Sharply trotting,—for the congestion was less for the moment,—the leaders reached the crest of the hill and lessened their pace for the downward slope. For, as everybody knew, Mr. Jennings explained good-naturedly to Son, the chances were a thousand to one you would snap your pole if you neglected to take this precaution. “Break it short off, by thunder!” he said impressively.

Tom

But Son did not hear. For down in the valley he could see a green level field, cool as an emerald after the dusty road. The sky was brilliant, and against it stood out sharp the outlines of the watching mountains. Great masses of cloud moved slowly across the blue, casting shadows over their slopes. Son longed for time to notice their mysterious changes of form, their luminous colors and watery depths.

But already the field was growing bigger, —men and horses had ceased to look like puppets, the freshly whitewashed fence glittered in the sun, and it was as hot as ever.

Inside the gate the confusion was worse than on the road. One driver did not know where to go, and the two old ladies in black silk with tiny sunshades, who were his fares, turned deaf ears to all offers of aid, thinking to discern behind each one some hostile *arrière pensée*. A policeman—if such are made by uniform and buttons—was standing by, letting people work themselves out of their difficulties as best they might. His

“Son”

helmet was on the back of his head, and he was chewing a straw, cracking jokes the while with his acquaintances. Son found time to observe him with open-eyed disapproval. He longed to show him a *real* policeman, — one who was his intimate friend, — named Jim. One look at Jim would crush the spirit of this undignified rustic; of that Son was certain.

Meanwhile Mr. Jennings, avoiding all obstacles, had landed his brake in the proper parking-space, and the agile grooms were busying themselves with the horses. Their master had descended somewhat heavily, followed by Son, and was superintending the unharnessing and blanketing, enjoying once more his prerogative of giving orders.

Amid the laughter of the ladies the brake was then drawn up close to the rail, and the violet one extended jauntily two little prettily slippered feet. One of the gentlemen, a young one, climbed over from the middle seat and took the now vacant place beside

Tom

her, carrying on with her a whispered conversation which seemed to amuse them both very much.

The village band struck up a lively tune, which to Son's uncritical ear was martial music, and added greatly to his excitement. He slipped away from his big companion, and wandered about among the tents which constituted that part of the show called by courtesy "the fair." The pink lemonade looked inviting, but he lacked the necessary nickel, and Mother was too busy talking to be disturbed. Son went over to a booth where people were aiming with baseballs at half a dozen grotesque masques. He watched for several minutes the jovial and generally unsuccessful attempts of many competitors, wishing that Mr. Jennings would try and put these bunglers to shame. In one he recognized a coachman whom he had often seen sitting up very straight on his box, looking neither to right nor left. He threw the worst of all, with his white tie under one ear. His efforts caused boisterous mirth, in which he

“Son”

himself joined loudly, and Son nearly died laughing too.

Looking up, he saw the cutunder of their adventure just entering the grounds, the horse walking along with a certain conscious dignity. “I wonder what made him change his mind!” thought Son. “Perhaps he did not want the people to be disappointed.” Suddenly he heard a class being called through the megaphone, and running in and out among the blanketed horses, clambered up on the fence in front of his own parking-space. The top rail was well covered with children, villagers and summer visitors rubbing shoulders, while their elders stood good-temperedly behind.

It looked hot inside the wooden pavilion known as the judges’ stand. The judges were all there, — two short ones on chairs, and the third, who was tall and much cut in at the waist, posed gracefully against the rail. At the foot of the stand were grouped figures long familiar to Son,—the local veterinary, a handsome fellow in a black and white

checked suit; an enormously fat man in a white waistcoat, whom Son sincerely pitied on this warm day, — owner of a small livery stable that was always disintegrating and somehow being nursed along again for the next season. There, too, were the successful liverymen, brothers, standing side by side, with thin, dissipated faces as inscrutable as any to be met on the tenderloin, and, moving up and down nervously, a little neat gentleman who had no entries and nothing to do with the show, but merely liked to be everywhere and talk with every one.

All these people interested Son more than the class that was about to be judged, which consisted of heavy pairs in harness. At last it was time to award the ribbons. He watched them all, — blue, red, yellow, and, last, white, — watched until the colors swam before his eyes and his heart beat like a trip-hammer. For Baby's was the next class.

One of those big, puffy clouds drifted slowly across the sun, and a fresh breeze lifted for a moment the awning over the

“Son”

grand stand as if it had been a sail. Every one felt the relief of it, and people moved about in the crowded boxes, chatting, laughing, and ready to be pleased. Even the horses noticed it, and from the paddock to the right of the wooden structure that penned in the fashionable throng, came many a joyful snort and whinny. Son's little cramped hands dug into the wooden rail. For the ponies were coming in.

“How sweet!” he heard the violet girl say on the brake. “Look at his little ears!”

And from that moment he no longer loved her. For it was the Reynolds' pony that she meant.

It was a big class,—five, six, seven,—Baby would make eight.

Where *was* Baby?

The Reynolds' pony was trotting up and down, always nearest the rail. Son could have touched him, so close was he. And as he passed he lifted his little feet proudly. A groom drove him, and with him in the cart was a boy of about Son's age. Then there

Tom

was a piebald, driven by a girl whom Son knew, — a big girl, he thought scornfully, — as much as eight years old! One pony was a Shetland, — nothing but a toy. A groom was driving him, too, and his owners were two small boys in sailor suits, twins, with vacuous faces and innocent eyes exactly alike. That one there was a pretty one! A bay. Almost as showy as the Reynolds' pony and far harder to handle. A boy in a norfolk jacket was managing him alone, giving a very nice exhibition of skill. A much older girl was driving in a surrey a pampered gray pony that looked over-fed. Son didn't notice the rest, for his impatience was burning him up.

Where was Baby?

He looked across the track, and saw Father over by the judges' stand, eyes fastened on the gate by which Baby must come in, and with a very grave face. Son's heart almost stopped beating, for the ponies were lining up to be judged. He could bear it no longer, and without stopping to look for Mother,

“Son”

rushed wildly back of the green painted grand stand, toward the paddock.

There they were! There was Baby — and Peter — and everybody! But what was the matter? And why was Tom bending over and looking at Peter's legs, instead of sitting in the cart? “Baby!” he sobbed, long before there was any possibility of being heard, — “Oh, Baby! *Hurry up!*” At last Tom was in, and they were ready. But the gate was closed. Son rushed up to it, sobbing still, and tried to tear at it with his hands. He was so blinded by tears that he did not see the man standing beside it, until the latter called out with a smile, “All right, little boy! Don't worry! Plenty of time!” and opened the gate.

Son saw that Tom had the reins. “Probably he thinks she's too little to drive him through,” he said to himself. “But she could do it! Yes, she could!”

He ran behind the cart; crossed the track, reached the judges' stand, and slipped his hand into Father's.

Tom

What a relief! Tom had given Baby the reins. The whole tension of Son's body relaxed.

"Let her drive up and down once or twice," said the reddest-faced judge to Tom.

So Baby, eyes front, cheeks glowing, a soft curl or two lifted by the breeze, started up the track amid the cheers of the crowd.

Baby never noticed them, but Son experienced the intoxication of popular acclaim. He wanted to shout back in a mighty voice, "*She's my sister!*" Strung up to the highest pitch, he was the first to feel the change in their humor. What was it?

No cheering now . . . and yet not silence . . . Men were protesting, women crying out . . . Peter, who had started out so well, had begun to break. . . .

Tom had taken the reins, turned the pony, and succeeded in bringing him into line, where he stood still for a moment, and then began to paw frantically, first with one delicate little hoof, then with another. The red face of the judge had grown purple.

“Son”

“Have you lost your senses?” he snarled at Tom. “Take that child out!”

But Father with one spring had reached the cart before Tom could obey, had grabbed Baby, and was holding her on his arm. Loud hisses had begun to be audible, — derisive fingers pointed at Tom. Amid the wrathful murmurs, cries of “Gate! gate! Give him the gate!” could be heard on all sides. For a moment no one thought of Baby, who had squirmed to be put down, and was now standing all alone in her white dress, her dimpled knees showing, her little whip grasped firmly in her gloved right hand. The judges were talking in low tones, and Son heard such words as “shameful,” “risk,” “danger,” and “dope.”

Tom, looking up, saw every hand pointing at the gate.

He bent his head and drove silently through, and the man who had smiled at Son followed him with a look of contempt.

Son, crushed for a moment, realized that there was something to be saved from the

Tom

wreck of his world. He fumbled in his pocket, ran over to Baby, and cried in a brave voice that trembled very much :

“ Here, Darling ! Here ’s your ribbon ! ”

Then lifting to the irate judge his white, dejected face, “ Have you got a pin ? ” he said. The judge produced one, and Son, with hands that were almost numb, decorated the dainty frock with an enormous green rosette. His heart rose in thankfulness to the crowd who were so kind to Baby, — for once more every body clapped. If any one had whispered in his ear at that moment that the applause was meant for *him*, he would not in the least have grasped the significance of the words.

As for Baby herself, her face was wreathed in smiles, and the owner of the Reynolds’ pony, who won the blue, was not half so proud as she. Whenever a fresh wave of disappointment threatened to overcome Son, he stole a look at her happy face, and little warm feelings of comfort began to melt the ice at his heart.

“Son”

When the track had been cleared, Father crossed it, holding a child by each hand, and made his way over to the brake. Son, much to his confusion, was surrounded by ladies, who had all descended and were prepared to make much of him, — even the violet one.

“What a darling!” they were saying. “Such a sweet little brother! Couldn’t bear to have her disappointed! How did he ever think of it! Most unfortunate!”

All these comments descended on Son, for Baby would have none of them. Suddenly Son rushed over to Mother, buried his face in her dress and burst into a passion of tears.

“Poor old fellow!” he heard Father say, “he’s all upset. No, thanks, old man, we’ll get a cutunder right here. I’ve got to get these children home.”

“All right,” Mr. Jennings replied, “but I’d like to have ’em on the brake. Both of ’em. Great kids.”

Mother was busy whispering to Son. Her pretty gown was all crumpled on the trodden grass, but she did not know it. Both forgot

Tom

for a moment that there were any other people in the world.

Son was put into the front seat of the cut-under, — Mother, Baby, and the nurse behind. Where was Father going to sit?

“I’ve got to look after the pony,” the latter said, “before that fool gets at him. I’ll drive him home as soon as he’s fit. I won’t be long.”

He turned away, but Son called after him.

“*Father!*” he said, “isn’t Tom going to drive Peter home?”

Father came back. Son had never seen his face look as it did now.

“I think you’re old enough to understand,” he said. “That man, out of idiocy and vanity or heaven knows what, took it upon himself to endanger your little sister’s life. He rubbed turpentine into the pony’s legs. He tried to cheat the Association by a low trick. I’m going to borrow the money from Jennings to pay him off this minute. Don’t ever speak to me of him again.”

During the progress of this speech, in

“Son”

which the law was being laid down to him, Son's mind was drawing its own conclusions on the evidence.

“It was to make him step,” was all he said, in a little voice that died half-way to Father's retreating form.

It would have been a silent party that drove slowly home had not Baby talked and laughed continuously, playing with her ribbon.

Poor Son! There seemed to be no end to his responsibilities. Before the reality of this last disaster, the rest was mere child's play. For he saw continually before his eyes Tom's bent head at the moment in which with such cruel curtness he had been ordered off the track. It was Father who did not understand. Somehow people never understood things. Son knew, as he knew that he was alive, why Tom had done this thing. It was all out of love—great, big, warm love—that he had done it. Tom would have gone through fire or water for Baby—he would at any moment have sacrificed his life for her. And if, to secure her a pleasure, it became necessary to

Tom

commit crime or pull off a sharp trick, it was all one to him. That he had never thought of danger went without saying. How easy it was to understand! But, oh, how impossible to explain!

And in the end he was saved from attempting this Herculean task. For what Father and Mother lacked in appreciation they made up in affection, and they let Son go after Tom next day, just because they saw how tremendously he cared.

Son, on his little bicycle, made for the blacksmith's shop. His instinct had not erred in telling him where to look.

Tom had been standing motionless in the doorway for hours, but when he saw Son he disappeared inside.

Son leaned his bicycle against the wall and went in, past the clanging anvils, to the spot where Tom was hiding in the shadows. Son took his hand and led him out into the sunshine, chatting all the time.

"The harness hasn't been cleaned, and the

“Son”

cart is all dusty,” he said; but there was no response.

“Father and Mother said I could come and get you,” he continued. But Tom did not brighten.

“Baby is waiting to give Peter his sugar,” said Son.

And Tom ran back into the shop to get his hat.

NILS

NILS



“**H**IS reference is *perfect*,” said Mother. Father said nothing. He had heard that sanguine tone before. But Mother looked so pretty, with her flushed cheeks and bright eyes, that he decided then and there to keep silence not only as to the possibility of fresh disappointment, but as to the unwisdom of the added expense.

“I can write another story,” he thought, “a pot-boiler.” And he began to revolve in his mind plots with a feminine detective interest, putting off until some future time the planning of an article on certain reforms in the Criminal Law.

So the fourth butler was engaged. The three that preceded him had served but a short week apiece. The last had had a countenance void of expression, and a tread that shook the floor of the poor little house.

“Son”

Twenty feet front was a space far too small for such impressiveness.

“W-h-y,” Son had said, as he entered the dining-room on the second morning of the reign of this personage, turning toward him with a smile of pleased recognition, “there’s the goat!”

“What do you mean?” said Father.
“What goat?”

“The buster-goat.”

This was too much. The man retired into the pantry, for he was in danger of losing his most precious asset, his gravity. If he *had* shown for a moment a touch of humanity, and had “m-a-a-d” at Son and Baby from behind the door as they came in, that was neither here nor there. He came back impassive as ever. And at the end of seven days he moved on to a place where there were no children, and where in his joyless formality he vied with his employers themselves.

“His name is Lundstrom,” said Mother,
“Nils Lundstrom. But Lundstrom is too hard

Nils

to say. I think we shall have to call him Nils."

When Nils had been in the house three days, Father began to admit to himself that he was not like the others.

"She's stumbled on it again," he thought,—"run right onto it in the dark." For he was a firm believer in Mother's luck. He found it surprisingly easy to get used to being waited on, while he grumbled a little on the side.

Mother was quite accustomed to this and did not mind it. She had sat opposite him at dinner for a number of years now, hearing him talk of his boyhood's porridge and of the simple fare he had had in his college days.

"I'd be perfectly satisfied to-night with a couple of poached eggs," he often said.

Yet it was he who gave the final word as to the capabilities of the cooks, of whom there had been in these years quite a procession, each giving place silently to a successor who a little excelled her in daintiness and skill.

“Son”

“By Jove! I’ve left my handkerchief,” Father would exclaim as Nils was opening the front door. And it was hardly a second that he and Mother would have to wait—just time enough for a glance at himself in the mirror, an instant’s adjusting of the soft fur at her neck—before Nils had sprung up the three flights of stairs and was down again with the required article in his hand.

He would emerge from nowhere to announce that the motor was at the door, or appear noiselessly in Mother’s sitting-room to ask whether she cared to speak to whoever might be at the telephone. No more ringing of the extension bell at the behest of any chance milliner seeking renewed custom or stranger wishing to investigate a servant’s reference, as in the days of ease-loving parlor-maids.

And during a hiatus of furnace men he stoked the furnace himself, though it was in the height of the season and he was very busy getting ready for a number of little dinners.

Nils

"The silver was in *such* a state," thought Mother, looking with satisfaction at two Georgian boxes, — wedding presents, which had just been rubbed into the beauty they had possessed on that day, now so long ago, when she had first taken them out of their wrappings. And because the machinery of the house went on, she did not hurry herself in filling in the interim between out-going Michael and in-coming Patrick.

"It's much more fun to have only eight for dinner, and it is much less work, as well as being cheaper," Mother would say to Father, as she gave a last glance at the well-appointed table, with its few flowers exquisitely arranged. She never had to touch the flowers now, — Nils did it all, — and the dinners of eight went so well, and were so much appreciated, that they began to take place very often.

Women liked to sit in the impanelled drawing-room, with its graceful chairs of another age, from which worn gilt and one-time white enamel were crumbling, merging

“Son”

and blending into an exquisite bit of color. For Mother had the feel of these things, and knew where to pick them up.

And afterwards they liked to join the men in the library, which, if less dainty, had an air of very solid comfort. This was Father's sanctum, and adhering sternly to his ideals in this case, he would not hear of banishing a chair whose cushions were getting thin or a sofa whose leather was worn. So all sat on and on, listening to his amusing stories if he was in the vein, or talking comfortably in groups, until late in the night.

Then, when they were all gone, Nils would put out the lights.

One day at lunch, Son, eating his chop, glanced up to see two dark eyes fixed on his face. Utterly free from self-consciousness though he was, there was something about them that made him vaguely uncomfortable.

After that he often encountered this puzzling look, and in bed at night it would come back to him. It made him long unspeakably for

Nils

something — he knew not what. He would go to sleep, unsatisfied, and dream of great, lonely lakes, going on and on into infinite distance. Over these lakes hovered majestic mountains, and the light that glimmered on all was neither sunlight nor moonlight, but something just between.

Yet Son, who made friends with everybody, did not succeed in making friends with Nils. His tentative efforts were met with gentleness, and gently warded off.

At breakfast one day, Baby, who had come down to wish Father good morning, and was running about at will, fell and bumped her head smartly on the floor.

Before Father could put down his newspaper, or Son swallow his mouthful of egg (Mother never came to breakfast), Nils in one flash had reached her, caught her in his arms, and held her against his heart with a look that burned into Son's very soul. He took her instantly to Father and set her on his knee, where she soon began to play with a proffered pencil, her woe all forgotten.

“Son”

But Son ran out to Nils in the pantry, and, trembling all over, looked up into his face.

“Oh, *why* did you look at Baby like that?” he said.

Then Nils patted Son's head reassuringly, and, turning away, busied himself among the dishes.

“Mother,” Son said that evening, picking up little things from her dressing-table, “why don't you let Nils go out sometimes in the afternoon? All the other butlers do.”

“Son,” said Mother, who was in a hurry, “I've told you a thousand times to let those things alone. If you touch them again you'll have to go right upstairs. He doesn't want to go out. He's never asked me.”

She moved the displaced articles about with her delicate fingers, here a glove buttoner, there a shell comb, creating order absently.

“All the other butlers do,” reiterated Son, stubbornly for him. Out of many memories of the crowded Mall on a sunny winter's day,

Nils

he was picking up one class for reconsideration. One young man, who officiated at the home of a friend of Son's, he had seen that very afternoon, wheeling his baby in a perambulator, while his young wife walked at his side. Another, older, had promenaded up and down alone, enjoying a cigar. A third, while in the company of one or two friends, had watched for a long time a group of children playing hop-sotch, and had looked as if he would like to join in himself.

"Species, Butler" was the unconscious classification of all these persons in Son's mind.

Mother, who was ready, gave Son a hasty kiss, and ran into Father's dressing-room to hurry him up.

Five minutes later Son heard the front door close behind them. He ran downstairs very silently, he did not know why himself. The house was full of shadows, and in the unlighted library, as he tiptoed by, he could see on the ceiling, upside down, the shapes of Tiny Things made Tall. The curtains had

“Son”

not been drawn, and the street lamps were shining in.

Son felt very queer, and wished that he could turn back, — but he couldn't. He felt that some one wanted him there in the dark. So he was not surprised to see in the dimness of the lower hall a motionless figure standing — not even when he made out its outline, and traced the figure's head buried in its hands.

But when a shudder ran through the man's frame, and he put out a hand gropingly, Son was there, offering his little narrow shoulder for support. For it was for this that he had braved the whispering stillness of the house.

“Are you better now?” Son asked presently.

And Nils breathed a “Yes.”

After this he understood the eyes better.

“I want you, Son!” they said to him, —
“I need you! — But don't tell.”

He felt convinced that they were asking him not to tell, so he went about his little affairs busily and said nothing.

Nils

"I think Son has something on his mind," said Father one day. "He goes around so quietly and looks so solemn. I don't believe I've heard him laugh for a week."

"He's all right," Mother answered. "You can't judge him by other boys."

"I wish you *could*!" said Father petulantly. "Why, a boy at seven ought to be tearing the house down."

Mother looked up and her eyes fell complacently upon her attractive surroundings. It occurred to her to be glad that Son did not belong to the "tearing" type of boy. But she knew better than to express her thought aloud.

"He'll come to it later," she said.

"He ought to have a boy's interests," went on Father, walking up and down. "A dog, for instance. Why couldn't he have a dog?"

"He's afraid of dogs," said Mother quickly, in sudden perturbation, forgetting all her tact.

"Afraid!" stormed Father. "Who ever heard of such a thing? I'll bring one home to-night."

“Son”

Poor Mother thought sorrowfully of chewed chairs and marred woodwork. But she knew that she had lost her chance. “How idiotic of me!” she reflected.

Meanwhile Father was hanging by a strap in the subway train, his mind full of ferocious bulldogs, valiant St. Bernards, and other canines. He came out into the frosty air and made for his office.

Walking quickly, he had almost arrived at the roped off space behind which, in the middle of the street, the curb brokers were gesticulating inanely, when something arrested his attention. A man was holding out for his inspection an infinitesimal atom of dog flesh.

“Nice dog!” said the man insinuatingly. And the puppy blinked in Father’s direction with his brown, velvety eyes.

Father hesitated.

“It isn’t the right type of dog,” he said to himself, trying to be resolute. And in this he did not make any mistake, for the puppy belonged to no known species.

Nils

In another moment he had bought it and put it in his pocket.

At his desk, having carefully shut the door of his private office, thus giving to office boy and stenographer the impression that he had important business to transact, he sat down, and took the little soft, foolish face between his hands. There he sat for a long time, answering the little creature's irresistible appeal.

"You and Son have got to be friends. Friends, do you hear, Fulsy?" said Father. Then he touched the cold, wet nose with his cheek.

And friends they were beyond Father's highest hope or expectation.

An hour's separation in the daytime, though it was hard enough, might be borne, but at night . . .

Mathilde was almost ready to give notice. "It is *ridicule!*" she raged, when she went down to the library to summon the higher powers.

“Son”

“You go up,” said Mother.

Father found the puppy sitting on Son's white bed, his eyes saying reproachfully, “You told me to be friends with him!”

“O Hell!” said Father. And he ran downstairs with his fingers in his ears, so as not to hear Mathilde.

But Son cuddled his puppy all night, his face against its quickly beating heart.

Whenever his secret threatened to weigh on him too heavily, Son had only to look at Fulsy to be strengthened and cheered. Father, in trying to make a man of Son, had but given him another object that appealed to the Mother in him.

Father might just as well have let him alone. For it was God that worked in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Son was just as God made him.

So thought Nils, who continued to look at him with devouring eyes. Though he talked no more than before, he had never discouraged Son's presence near him since that

Nils

night in the hall. Son loved to hover around, Fulsy in his arm, watching him at his work. Nils had the most wonderful hands, so nervous and skilful. They were white as ivory, and as delicately veined as the birch leaves whose tracery Son had often followed last Autumn with his finger, when he had picked up one that had fluttered to the ground.

It happened more than once, when Son was standing by, that the hands, working so feverishly, faltered and stopped. Then Son waited, anxious and ready. But whatever it might be that was wrong with the machine it righted itself, and went on, tremulously at first, then steadily as before.

Every second Sunday Nils went out, unless there were guests for dinner. When this occasionally happened, Son divined that Nils was bitterly disappointed. So was Son, for these Sundays were the bright spot in his vigil. When he came down to breakfast on the Monday following, he knew there would be a gleam of color in his friend's thin cheeks, a light that was almost happy in his eyes.

“Son”

And Son would hug Fulsy, and a great weight would be lifted from his heart.

One night Fulsy had been taken down to the kitchen to his bath. Mathilde had been adamant. “Qu’il est sale, ce chien!” she had wailed, sweeping him firmly from the bed into her apron. “You t’ink I ’ave not’in’ to do but wash dogs, huh?” she had said accusingly to Son, turning out his light.

Then she had disappeared and left Son lying there, thinking that he knew just how Fulsy was feeling at that moment. Mathilde was thorough both with dogs and boys, and cleanliness was her god.

Son was so lonely that he could hardly bear it. If you have never *had* a dog, it would be different, but when you have been used for twenty-one nights to a little hot, palpitating live thing beside you . . .

Son started up in bed, almost deafened by the beating of his heart. Mathilde, with pretended forgetfulness, had left his door a little open. And while he was thinking of Fulsy, far below he had heard the muffled

Nils

sound of a fall. Son got out of bed, and in his pajamas flew down the stairs, his little bare feet sinking noiselessly into the heavy carpet, the confused sounds below growing momentarily more distinct.

"In here! We'll carry him in here," he heard Father say, and then a door was shut.

Son went into the drawing-room, where stood two or three ladies in a frightened group, — not Mother.

"Where's Mother?" cried Son, running up.

"In there," said one of the ladies, indicating the closed library door.

No one commented on his presence or his costume. The moment was too grave for that. They treated Son as one of themselves.

Never had Son heard anything with such a sense of relief as the opening of that door.

"He'll be all right in a minute," said Father, coming out. "He's coming to." He was followed by the other men, with Mother, who led her guests back to the dining-room, Father promising to join them as soon as the doctor should arrive.

“Son”

“Nothing serious, I hope . . . just faint . . . Lucky it was no worse . . .” Son heard as their voices died away in the distance.

But the dinner, which was served by the parlor maid with long pauses between the courses, was an effort for everybody, and as soon as it was over the guests left, no less glad to escape than Mother was to see them go.

The doctor had come, but Father had not put in an appearance to bid his visitors good-night. Mother ran upstairs hurriedly.

Nils was lying on the sofa, fully conscious, Father and the doctor were bending over him, and Son in his pajamas, with his little pink soles turned up, was kneeling beside him, holding his hand.

How long he would have stayed there will never be known, for it had not occurred to any one to put him out, had not Mathilde appeared in the doorway with his slippers in one hand and his wrapper—the red one with the white Teddy bears, that he delighted in—in the other.

Nils

“But they should have ‘honte’ to let him in his ‘robe-de-nuit’ like that!” she murmured, real consternation in her voice. And having disengaged his hand gently from the eager clasp of the sick man, she wrapped him in his belongings and prepared to carry him off.

“Oh, no!” said Son miserably.

“Non, and leave a little dog waitin’ for you upstairs?” said Mathilde. “Tu ne sais pas comme il s’impatiente, ce ‘Fulsie,’—va!”

And Son protested no more.

The next morning Mother came down to breakfast. Baby’s nurse had gone to church, Mathilde was busy, and there did not seem to be any one to carry up her tray.

Son was thankful that it was Sunday, for he could not have borne to be hurried off to school. Mother did not sit down behind the coffee-pot, but walked up and down, waiting impatiently for Father to come in.

“How is he?” she cried when she saw him.

“Son”

“Easier this morning,” he answered. “But we shall have to tell him what the doctor said.” He bit his lip, catching Mother’s quick glance in Son’s direction.

But Son had heard nothing. He was absorbed in his own thoughts. What week was this? No . . . Yes . . .

“It’s Nils’ Sunday out!” he cried piteously. “Oh, what will he do! Poor Nils!”

It was indeed Nils’ Sunday out. But he did not go to the mysterious regions from which he was wont to bring back that fitful color and that light of eyes. He went to the hospital instead.

Son loved the whiteness of it, — the shining wards, the muslin-curtained windows, the flower-pots, and the spotless beds. He loved above all Nils’ welcoming look when he came.

After the second visit came a busy season for Mother, — days packed with engagements. She did not know herself how they were slipping by. But when Son asked her for

Nils

the hundredth time, she took an hour and went with him to the hospital. Fulsy went too.

The white bed was empty. No head had pressed the pillow. For this was a paying ward, — Father and Mother had seen to that, — and not as overcrowded as the free ones.

“Where is he?” Mother demanded of the nurse, her voice sharp with anxiety.

“Oh, seventeen, you mean? Such a good patient. He never asked for anything. He left last week. Said he wanted to go home.”

“Home?” said Mother, entirely at a loss.

But Son’s heart leaped with joy. He could look down a long vista of days in Nils’ life, — days that were all filled with the happiness that used to come but twice a month.

“Of course!” he laughed. “That was where he went on his Sundays out! Home!”

They went in the motor to the address Mother had obtained at the office.

Mother was still puzzled, — almost angry with Nils. She was surprised, too, at the house in which he was living. The neighbor-

“Son”

hood was poor, but the house was modern and cheerful. Some of the landings were being scrubbed as Mother and Son climbed by, and the little square tiles shone.

The door of the flat was opened by a woman, still young and pretty. Behind her stood a boy of Son's age, but taller, holding his little sister by the hand. The woman was dressed in black.

Then Mother knew. And without a word she opened her arms and drew into them this other woman. There they stood for many minutes, their two bright heads together. They were soon talking as women may talk to one another.

“He never told me he was married,” said Mother.

“No, Madame,” said his wife. “He did not tell after he began to be sick. It was easier to get a place as a single man.”

“How long had he been ill?” Mother asked.

“About five years,” the woman answered.

“Oh, how must he have felt when he

Nils

was working! How *could* he work!" cried Mother.

Nils' wife looked over to where her children were standing, the boy's arm thrown protectingly now about his sister's shoulders. For little Alma was shy. She looked, and her lips quivered.

"He *had* to work, Madame," she said.

"How many places did he have?" asked Mother when she could speak.

"Two," answered the woman. "He would work as long as he could, — until they found it out. Then he would go away."

"Didn't they do anything for him?" cried Mother, aghast at such heartlessness.

"The last lady was very kind," returned the woman gently. "She gave him twenty-five dollars when he left. He had paid out about twenty-three for express packages and telegrams. But she had forgotten that. And she said she would give him a good reference."

Mother's mind went back to the perfect reference over the telephone.

"He wouldn't let me work," the woman

“Son”

went on. “He wanted me to be with the children. He was so proud of little Petersen.” Her voice broke.

There was a long silence.

“He came home to die,” the woman said at last reverently. “He didn’t want to die in the hospital. He would not let you know, for he said you had done enough for him.”

“Oh, why didn’t he?” cried Mother.

“He was always like that,” she responded with loving pride. “He did not want to trouble any one. He was happy with you,” she added, brightening. “Oh, how precious to him were your children!”

Mother’s eyes were riveted on this woman, who, with quiet dignity and in quaint English, sat telling her of the tragedy of her life. She contrasted with this her own protected existence, and she felt humbled to the dust.

“He was sorry,” said Nils’ wife, “that he frightened you so much. He knew that it was the end . . . But he could not know it would come so soon. It was his regret that he did not give his notice —”

Nils

“Don’t!” said Mother. For five years they have been getting ready — for this . . . she thought.

It was true. They had accepted it long ago, after the manner of their race.

The loss . . . thought Mother . . . The loss of him . . . When she had never had him . . . Oh, God, wasn’t that enough?

But there was more, much more besides. Mother saw it all in one terrible flash, saw it more distinctly than she had ever seen anything in all her life. The neat room, the well-dressed children, — all — all paid for with the man’s heart’s blood. And this woman, who loved him, had had to stay by and see him give it, even to the last drop. What was to become of them now?

“You won’t give up your children!” cried Mother.

“Never,” said the woman solemnly, lifting up her head. Her eyes looked into the distance, and she said it as though she were making a promise to some one beyond.

“He longed so to see your son once more,”

“Son”

she went on after a minute. “But it could not be. It was a little child! His last words were of him.”

“What did he say?” asked Mother through her tears.

“Don’t cry,” repeated Nils’ wife, controlling her voice. “He is the angel sent of God to help you — when I can help you no more.”

When they had looked at each other enough, Petersen and Son had made friends, as boys will.

“She’s not as big as Baby,” said Son, indicating the little girl, who was eyeing him askance.

“But she’s *big*,” said Petersen quickly, drawing Alma forward. “Where did you get him?” he asked, his eyes on Fulsy.

“Father brought him home to me from down town. Is Nils *your* father?” said Son.

“My Papa is dead,” said Petersen. He could not help feeling a little important. And, after all, people cannot get very well acquainted in two half days a month.

Nils

Son's head swam. Nils was dead, — Nils, whom he had so loved; Nils, who had been this boy's father.

“He's a good little pup,” said Petersen, still looking at Fulsy, who wriggled to be free.

Son went up to the boy, — this boy, whose father had been Nils, — Nils, who was now dead, — and put Fulsy into his arms.

“He's for you,” said Son.

BILL

BILL



“**W**HAT a pity he has no boys to play with!” said Father. “Companions of his own age are just what he needs.”

“I don’t know how he would get on with them,” Mother answered doubtfully. “Perhaps boys wouldn’t like him. He’s always been so much with older people.”

While they were talking about him, Son was standing a mile down the road, leaning on his bicycle, motionless and absorbed. On the other side of a wooden fence another boy was weeding in a vegetable garden.

“How much have you done?” asked Son.

“A good bit,” answered the other shortly. He was not working to kill time, but as if his heart were in it. And his supple little brown hands moved cheerfully, with no small deftness. Their callous hardness detracted not a whit from the soft and beautiful moulding

“Son”

that belongs to the hands of a child, and as he pulled up the weeds, the bent knuckles showed the delicacy of their lines through the dirt. Hands of babe, but back of old man, — so determined, and weary, and bent. Son's eye caught the line of it.

“Come and play with me!” he invited.

The boy shook his head.

“Ain't got time,” he said.

“They don't *make* you do it!” cried Son, in horror at such a possibility.

“Make me?” answered the boy. “Nope.”

Son stood silent. It seemed impossible to get any information out of his laconic friend.

“I'll help you!” he said.

The boy smiled, showing two rows of straight white teeth.

“You do that end,” he directed, pointing.

Son, streaming with sweat, stole an occasional surreptitious glance at his hardier companion, who appeared oblivious of the direct rays of the sun. Bees droned, light waves glimmered in the haze, and into Son's nostrils penetrated good odors of earth and growing

Bill

things. He shook off the drops that oozed out of his forehead, and paid no attention to the little hammer that beat on his temples.

"This bed's nearly done!" he cried at length, when the rays had begun to slant.

The other boy said nothing, but he stretched himself slowly into an erect position, and Son knew that they had toiled enough. Together they climbed the fence and stood looking at the bicycle.

"Don't you want a ride?" suggested Son.

"Don't know how," admitted the boy, ashamed.

"Of course not," Son said quickly, "if you haven't got one. It's easy, though."

"Learn me!" The demand was made eagerly.

"It's rather hard in bare feet," commented Son. But he changed his mind when he found out how the leathery soles could grip

"You're great!" he cried.

"G'wan," replied the other modestly.

The sun was drawing toward the west, a red ball of fire and smoke was curling upward

“Son”

invitingly from the red chimneys of the farmhouse near by, when the boy terminated the lesson abruptly.

“I’ve got to go to supper,” he said.

Son watched him run off down the pink-tinged road between the rows of ash trees, and disappear into the house. Then he mounted his bicycle and rode off contentedly enough, for though no word had been said there was a tacit understanding between the two that they should meet on the morrow. A hermit thrush accompanied Son with its song, exulting in the delicious chill that comes of a Maine evening after the hottest day.

Mother heard the crunching of his wheel, that made the tiny pebbles fly on the driveway, and came out, in fresh linen and a great shade hat, looking too tidy to touch. Nevertheless she put her arm about his reeking person.

“How hot you are!” she said. “Where have you been?” Then, not waiting for him to answer, — a habit of hers, — “You’ll just have time to dress. Run along!”

Bill

Son's thoughts were many as he went through this useless performance. It occurred to him to envy that other boy, who, work over, could sit down just as he was, begrimed and happy, to eat his well-earned food after labor.

It took three days to finish the vegetable garden. Then the boys began killing potato-bugs, — a much more difficult task. And finally it was proposed that they should go a-berrying on the mountains, an alluring prospect. Son dug his toe into the edge of an ant-hill, weighing this suggestion. His shoes and stockings were flung in a heap under a hammock, together with his coat and neck-tie. The sinews showed in his legs, and he stretched his toes luxuriously. One might learn much in three days as regarded one's comfort. From under his eyebrows he glanced up at his new friend shyly. How explain to him? It had pleased Son to keep utter silence at home as to his agricultural pursuits — and for a reason most embarrassing to divulge.

“Son”

Last night, work finished, the two had regaled themselves with boyish sports, — ball playing, running races, jumping. Son was serving an apprenticeship. His new friend, taller, stronger, toughened by exposure and outdoor life, was his model. Last night Son had watched him running, his little body silhouetted against a glowing sky, head thrown back, teeth flashing in a joyous smile, throat bare, lean arms bare, legs bare, weight flung in ecstasy on the evening breeze. This, then, was a boy. This was what was meant by “manly.”

Son's heart burned with a fury of admiration, — of desire to emulate, mingled strangely with a feeling of romance. This new thing, — a playmate, — and such a playmate! — was his discovery. Son had ferreted him out, — digging sedately with bent shoulders among onions and cabbages, — had shared his labor, thus gaining a magic key to his confidence, and had appropriated him. He could not drag him out for everybody to handle!

Son's conscience was perfectly clear. His

Bill

friend's abode — the white farm-house — was within bounds. Did not the rules done into rhyme by Father for his easy memorizing, and hanging in full sight on the door of the coat closet, contain this couplet, —

“One long mile in each direction
You may go without correction”?

Son decided to give up the berrying, since the not doing so involved asking permission and thus divulging his secret.

“You will have to go without me,” he said with a great sigh. And he watched his friend off, — pail swinging, feet treading soberly, as if it were no wonderful privilege to do and go wherever you pleased.

“I didn't tell him why,” thought Son with satisfaction. “He doesn't think so much of *me* anyhow! He'd say I was a silly!”

“Weren't you lonely?” asked Son, when the endless hours had gone round and it was the next morning.

The boy's great eyes widened.

“*Me!*” he said.

“Son”

Son secretly determined never to be lonely again.

“Did you get caught in the thunder shower?” he went on.

“Yep,” answered his friend indifferently. “I kep’ right on pickin’. I got four quarts.”

“You must have been soaked!” cried Son.

His friend gave him a commiserating look. “Ain’t you ever been wet?” he asked.

“Not—not very often,” admitted Son, longing for another thunder shower, that he might walk abroad in it.

“Wait a minute,” said the boy suddenly.

Son waited, never having had any intention of leaving.

The boy came back, running, from the house. Before Son’s astonished gaze he held out a handful of pennies, their hue matched by the rich brown of his hands.

“Your share,” he said. “I’ve counted ’em over twice. There’s ten of ’em.”

“What for?” wondered Son.

“For the weedin’,” said the boy. “And the bugs. Weedin’s a cent a row. Bugs,

Bill

five cents a hundred. Dad paid up last night. But there ain't near enough yet."

Son put the pennies in his pocket.

"What you goin' to do with yours?" asked the boy.

"I don't know," said Son. "What are you?"

The boy came quite close, hands in pockets.

"I'm goin' to the fair at Elliston," he said, and stood back to witness the effect of the statement.

It produced no effect on Son at all.

"It's seven mile," he added disappointedly.

"Do you drive there?" asked Son. Distances meant little to him.

"Nope," said the boy. "Walk."

Son was beginning to be impressed. Walk — seven miles and back — to a fair!

"You can take my bicycle!" he cried in sudden inspiration.

The boy shook his head.

"I wouldn't dast," he said. "Might smash it, or somethin'. Dad 'd be mad."

“Son”

Son put his hand in his pocket, fished up the pennies and held them out.

“I don’t need them!” he said. “I’m not going to the fair!”

The boy did not move. His lips drew together stubbornly.

“You earned ’em!” he said. “They’re yourn.”

Son did not know what to do. He stood, uncomfortable and helpless, hating the reward of his labor of love.

“Did you sell the berries?” he asked, not knowing what else to say.

The boy grinned.

“Nothin’ in *that* deal!” he answered. “I took ’em to five houses, but no one wanted berries. Ma’s goin’ to use ’em for pies.”

Son was aghast. The long day on the mountain in blistering sunlight, — the sudden storm. Wind, bringing in its wake drenching sheets of rain, — heat, wet, weariness, fruitless hawking about of his hard-earned wares.

“It’s too bad!” stammered Son.

The boy looked at him in surprise.

Bill

"No 'get rich quick' for me, I guess," he said philosophically. "I'd better stick to bugs. Want to play horse?"

They got the wagon, made of a packing box, out of the shed.

"I'll pull you!" cried Son. "I'll pull you all the time!"

The boy frowned.

"You haul me," he said, "and then I'll haul *you*."

And with this arrangement Son was forced to be content.

That night in bed his thoughts flew back to his friend. "He meant to pay me all the time," he reflected. "He let me weed, when he could have done it all himself, and kept all the money." Son wriggled his head on the pillow. "It's no use to tell Mother," he decided. "If he wouldn't let *me* help him, he'd never let *her*."

"He won't let me be generous to him," was his last waking thought, "when he's so generous to me. What can I do with him?"

Father and Mother commented on Son's

“Son”

appearance with great satisfaction to themselves.

“The country air is doing him good!” said Mother oracularly.

“He looks hard as nails!” agreed Father with enthusiasm.

As fair time drew near and the little store of pennies waxed but slowly, the boy redoubled his energy. No time now for playing horse. No strength for Olympic feats in the sunset! Work, work, work! Up to the limit of endurance,—and ending only with the latest glimmer of daylight. Son’s heart ached as he stood by inactive, and saw the strong little shoulders droop more and more,—the supple feet shuffle through the furrows. One day he could find his friend nowhere, and he was moved to take his courage in his hands and knock at the farm-house door. He was admitted by a pleasant-looking, elderly woman, wiping her hands in her apron.

“Bill’s sick,” she replied in answer to his inquiries. “Been feverish all night. I put him to bed.”

Bill

Son was choking with anxiety.

"Do you think he'll be well in time for the Elliston fair next week?" he asked.

"Fair?" she asked vaguely. "Was he goin'?" Oh, yes, he'll be well in a day or two. Just a touch of the sun, I guess."

"Can I see him?" Son begged.

"Certainly," said Bill's mother. "Come this way."

Son was shocked at his friend's face.

"Oh, Bill," he whispered, "I'm so sorry you're sick!"

"'Tain't nothin'," the boy muttered. "I'll stay here to-day. Can't stay any longer, you bet!"

He moved restlessly, and Son thought he had better go.

"I've got all but nineteen cents!" Bill called after him.

Son, full of apprehension, could hardly bear the beating of his heart next day as he came in sight of the now familiar white house. Yes — no — yes, — surely, that was Bill, digging dandelions!

“Son”

“Hurrah!” shouted Son, vaulting from his bicycle.

Bill looked up, smiling weakly.

“I’ve got a big bunch already!” he said in a hoarse and tremulous voice, and went on picking.

“You’re not really better!” cried Son with sharp intuition.

“Bah!” was Bill’s reply.

“Did your mother let you get up?” Son asked.

“It’s washin’ day,” was the succinct answer.

Son did not appreciate all that this remark connoted.

“How much are you going to earn?” he asked.

“A dollar,” replied Bill promptly.

“It doesn’t cost all that to get in, does it?” asked Son.

“Nope,” Bill replied. “You git in for a quarter.”

“What do you want the rest for?” Son was puzzled.

“Ma never gits to a fair nohow,” was the

Bill

irrelevant reply. "When she ain't washin' she's makin' pies, er dryin' fish, er some-thin'." Bill's brown eyes deepened and glowed, as though he were seeing visions and dreaming dreams. "Mebbe they'd have dress-goods there. I dunno!" he added thoughtfully.

Son's ideas as to the buying power of seventy-five cents did not differ materially from those of his friend. Together they stood lost in thought over the disbursing of so goodly a sum. Then Bill went back to his dandelions.

Son, in bed, deliciously drowsy, heard the rustling of trees in a strong north-west breeze. It sounded wild, but it wasn't really, for the warm wind as it moved along had swept up every smell of earth and trees and flowers, and was flinging them in mingled odors through his window. The light that fell was caught from the gold of the little sails that flapped on the bay, and from the bright wings of sea-gulls. He rubbed his eyes, feeling that something portentous was about to happen. Well, so it was!

“Son”

Son, fully awake, realized that this was the day of the Elliston fair. In a tumult of joy he tumbled out, and dressed with feverish haste. Not that there was any need to hurry, for he should not see his friend that day. Bill had been on his way there many hours. Son stopped in the midst of brushing his hair, and with much secrecy opened his upper drawer, and pulled therefrom a hand-knit boy's sock. Carrying it over to his bed with both hands, for it was heavy, he took it by the toe, whereupon its contents fell with subdued clatter upon the blankets. In the glittering sunshine the heap of coins shone gold, and Son's face shone too, so that he seemed akin to sails and wings of gull, and all that breathed and radiated happiness on such a morning. Son picked up a penny, then a nickel, then a dime, and then he let a little heap of coins trickle through his fingers, so that he could come close to Bill, — his Bill, — at thought of whom his bosom swelled with pride that a boy like himself had earned every penny by the sweat of his brow. Son had

Bill

hated to accept the pile the day before in exchange for his own crisp one dollar note. It took all his friend's practical efforts to persuade him that he was giving an equivalent for what he received.

"I could never carry it in the stocking!" Bill had laughed. "Walkin' all that way! I'd swelter!"

"Where will you put the dollar?" Son had asked anxiously.

"Dunno," Bill said, scratching his head.

The decision had been difficult, Bill not wearing winter shoes into which a bank note might be stuffed, nor hat in whose lining it could be concealed. Finally they had put it in his trousers' pocket,—no less obvious receptacle offering itself.

"That'll have to do," Son had said in a dissatisfied manner. "Positive there are no holes in it?"

To which Bill had replied, "Ma mends them superbly," but had nevertheless thrust in his hand to make sure that he was not over-stating.

“Son”

Now Son toyed with the money, each bit bringing home to him some fond memory of dogged pluck. Truly he was a miser, for he felt that he loved the coins in themselves, and could never see them spent to the longest day of his life. For hours he wandered about, attending to nothing, his spirit on the dusty road, folding its wings to toil along faithfully at his friend's side.

Even Bill's calmer nature had felt all sorts of inward stirrings when he had taken his candle the night before and gone up to bed. You might belong to good farming stock, the backbone of the country. You might work your fingers to the bone, showing what stuff you were made of. You might have poise and balance enough for a full-grown man, — but if you were a boy, — a little boy at that, — only eight years old, your pulses would stir and your heart leap when the goal of your ambition was in sight.

Bill, during his brief undressing, was more and more upborne by an unheard of and delicious excitement. For something was going

Bill

to happen. Nothing had ever been going to happen before in all his life, he thought. His mind went back to the long winter evenings, when his big brothers sat by, smoking their pipes, elbows on knees, and he sat with them, chin on hands, book resting on the table, looking up every little while at his mother, whose gentle face, prematurely old, shone quiet in the light of the lamp that stood between them, and whose ever busy hands plied the knitting-needles and wrought stockings to clothe the feet of them all. Then perhaps they might hear a jingle of bells, and Dad would come in after a sharp, cold journey from some distant mart, his overcoat powdered with snow. Bill's heart beat a little quicker then with pleasure. Yes, a little quicker. But nothing to this!

Sometimes he shared these journeys with one brother or another or with his father, for Bill minded his own business and was never in the way. Then, as it grew cold and night came on, he would huddle down into his muffler, and watch for the light that shone

“Son”

out of the window like a friendly eye. Far better than the frosty stars so far away, that cheerful yellow glow of the lamp in his home ! It was friendly, to be sure. But so many times had it welcomed him that there was nothing in the sight of it to stir his blood like this, — like this.

Bill stood in the middle of the floor and hated to get into bed, for he was sure he could not sleep. In the room of his father and mother, next his alcove, all sounds had ceased. His brothers on the other side had ended their monosyllabic remarks, for slumber descended upon young and old, in the white farm-house, or ever the mantel clock got round to ten. He fixed his eyes upon the candle flame and thought his thoughts, never ceasing until there were two tongues and two candlesticks, hurting his eyes so much that he was recalled sharply from the untoward and bewildering flights of his imagination.

It was still candle-light when he awoke. But Bill knew the feel of the morning, and needed no timepiece to tell him what o'clock

Bill

it was. "I want to be there early," he muttered, putting on his clothes. The cold breakfast that he gathered together in the kitchen stuck in his throat. "There'll be enough left to buy a ice-cream cone," he reflected, thrusting his hand down to feel something that crinkled deliciously. But being a person of foresight he stuffed into another pocket a big hunk of bread and a slice of cheese. Then he started out.

The stars were paling and had almost disappeared; fields and trees began to glimmer green instead of gray. Then the breeze came up with the sun, and day burst into being. Oh, but the green was green, and the blue was blue! Not that Bill was thinking about it, as he walked along at an even pace, his dark eyes burning under their lashes.

"I wonder whether there'll be a two-headed calf," he was speculating, as the sweet air smote his forehead and made him move the quicker.

"I don't want to get there *too* soon," he decided presently, and flung himself un-

“Son”

der a tree, — “not before the other folks come.”

No solitude for him! No hanging about the empty booths, with men sleepily setting out their wares for a few stragglers to see. In with the crowd, the rush, the laughter! To be elbowed, pushed, jostled forward! That was life!

He had timed his arrival just right. In sight of Elliston village he hurried a little, because he could not help it. Wheels were crunching merrily to right of him, — big steel-tired ones, belonging to substantial farm-wagons, with their jolly loads of holiday makers. Some of these were from his own neighborhood, and recognized him. “Hi there, ‘Bill! Where you goin’? Don’t buy the fair out before we git thar!” and other pleasantries of equal originality. But most of them were strange to him. He took in every detail of their costumes, — the girls’ frills and ribbons, the men’s high collars, torturing their sun-burned necks. When in his absorption he was nearly run down, he

Bill

laughed "fit to kill," and the annoyance of the burly driver who by pulling his nag back on his haunches averted the catastrophe, ended in a smile.

No one could help smiling with Bill to-day, so joyfully did his eyes sparkle, so glad were his footsteps, hurrying now, oblivious of the journey overpast.

Suddenly in the midst of these humble equipages, also going fair-ward, he beheld one of quite a different character. It was a basket phaeton drawn by a high-stepping little bay, with much-veined, glossy neck, and red nostrils quivering. Seated in the phaeton was a young lady, the like of whom Bill had never seen. Her attitude was one of boyish grace, for her back was bent in the posture of a child who does not care how it looks, and therefore looks its best. Her chin had an upward curve, and from under the broad Panama hat she had put on anyhow, the sunny ripples of her hair escaped rebelliously. She held the reins loosely in her ungloved hand, and was moved neither by the clatter

“Son”

about her nor by the angry snorting of her horse at being in the midst of it.

Bill, staring in mute admiration, was paralyzed when her eyes fixed themselves squarely on his. They were gray, with brown rims, and little brown flecks in them, and for the life of him he could not look away. Suddenly the vision reined in, reached over, and tapped his shoulder with the silver butt of her whip.

“Tag!” she said.

Bill saw stars. That this beautiful lady, removed from him by worlds and worlds of space, should come down out of the other and actually speak to him, was inexplicable.

“Don’t you know it’s ‘tag day’?” continued the goddess, in a tone of easy familiarity that added momentarily to his embarrassment.

Bill looked down into the dust at his feet and made no reply.

“Give me some money, please!”

It was an order, — peremptory, brooking no denial. Bill was observing the ground attentively, else he would have seen that the lady was looking at him very pleasantly out

Bill

of her hazel eyes as she gave it. He had never heard of the time-honored custom by virtue of which the petted daughter of a Maine Senator may with propriety demand of even a barefoot boy a donation for her favorite charity. But she thought he had.

"Something for the hospital," she repeated, waiting.

"If he had only had five cents! One of those nickels in the stocking! That much he could have spared. Would the lady be very angry at having to make change? He wanted to explain, but the words stuck in his throat. So he put his hand deep into his pocket, drew out his dollar, and coming close to the wheel, gave it over. She hesitated in genuine surprise, and then taking it, said warmly:

"What! A whole dollar! What a generous little boy you are! I'll tell all the sick children in the ward about you!"

Bill looked up as a little dog will when it hears tones of praise, and took in no word of what was being said,

"What a beautiful boy!" the girl thought,

“Son”

letting her glance travel from the dark eyes with their curled lashes to the brown, bared throat, the square shoulders, the erect poise, in keen appreciation of the strong young grace of little Bill. “Good-bye!” she called, looking back prettily over her shoulder as she drove off, for she was unconscious mistress of many arts.

Bill stood quiet, expecting her to come back with his change. Even when she had dwindled to a pin-point he thought this would turn, becoming larger and larger, until it was once more at his side, bending over him, — sorry for having teased him. Another driver shouted to him to get out of the way. This time Bill did not laugh, but moved a little, — not too far for her to see. She was keeping him too long. He could take a joke, — but not if it was carried too far! Not when it involved his dollar, that he had earned himself, every penny, and was going to spend at the fair.

Still she did not come.

Bill thought he remembered something —

Bill

something about sick children in a hospital. Yes, that was it. He ought to have told her about his mother's dress. He choked. She was so pretty,—she would have understood that. She would not have wanted him to give the money for his mother's dress to sick children in any hospital. But he had not told her. And she had not come back. She had gone. She did not know that his mother never went anywhere. She would never know it. Never, not even when the fair was over, and the years had gone on, and he was an old, old man. Never!

Bill's chest heaved, over and over, and he thought he should die of the sobs that were inside. But not a whimper,—not one, that could direct at his misery even one glance, curious or sympathetic, from all their eyes. If they would only go,—go to their Elliston Fair, and leave him alone! The crowd, for which he had longed so ardently, was most hateful to him of all things on earth.

“Son”

“She never gits nowhar,” he muttered, as he turned slowly and set his face toward home.

Son’s restlessness had grown on him as the morning wore on. Still thinking of his friend, he finally decided to read, and came upon the piazza seeking his book. Father was sitting there, and Mother was at the telephone just inside the door.

“Senator Hillhouse wants us to come over to lunch,” she said, coming out. “Marjorie says there’s a fair to-day, and she thinks it would be fine to go for a few minutes. Why, Son, what on earth —”

In the wildest excitement he had thrown his arms around her, and was pleading:

“Oh, Mother, take me with you! Ask her if I can come too!”

Father and Mother exchanged surprised glances. Son was such a decorous little boy, and never minded being left out of any excursions, so many things had he always planned to do.

Bill

"I might ask," Mother said doubtfully. "Marjorie wouldn't mind. There's no one else coming."

"Oh, take him along," said Father. "No one'll know that he's there!"

Thus it came about that a belated survey carrying four passengers and following the line of travel in the direction of Elliston had the road all to itself. Son sat on the front seat next the driver, and said not a word. In what booth should they find him? Gazing at what wonder? Buying what rich gifts?

"There's Marjorie now," cried Mother, "coming to meet us."

"Hello!" cried the girl, as the two carriages came to a stop. "I've been on the road for hours. Started early to breakfast with a friend of mine down the road, and telephoned from there. I thought I'd drive out this way and escort you back."

They talked a few moments, and then the girl looked at Son.

"Want to get in with me?" she said invitingly.

“Son”

“He’d love to,” responded Mother quickly. And Father admonished her under his breath.

“Don’t put words into his mouth! Let him answer for himself.”

Son, willing to oblige, though his thoughts were elsewhere, clambered out of his own carriage and into the basket trap. He was glad in a few moments that he had come, so easy was it for his hostess to talk to boys. They were deep in conversation, when Son suddenly turned white and gripped her arm.

“What’s the matter?” she asked in alarm.

“It’s Bill!” cried Son. “And he’s coming back! Oh, *stop*, and let me speak to him!”

Bill, shuffling along, shoulders bent, head drooping, saw nothing, heard nothing.

“Bill!” shouted Son.

Then Bill looked up.

“It’s *my* boy,” said the girl wonderingly. “The boy that gave me a dollar for the hospital.”

Son stopped in the act of getting out.

“Bill gave you his dollar?” he cried, incredulous. “His dollar that he earned?”

Bill

Bill, looking up, had seen her whom he had thought never to behold again, — seen her with his own familiar friend at her side, waving to him. It was too much. He put both fists into his eyes, and sobbed as though his heart would break.

An hour later, between Son and Marjorie, tightly holding a hand of each, he was entering his land of promise.

Father and Mother walked behind.

“Pity he has no companions,” said Father.

Mother did not smile. She was watching the two boys, shoulder pressing shoulder, heads close together, while their hearts beat high in friendship and anticipation.

THE OUTLAW

THE OUTLAW



“IT’S a two-mile carry,” said Nang.

“What of it?” wondered Son. He had spent two days in fishing the silent streams and dreaming the hours away; the blood coursed through his veins and glowed in his cheeks, adding to the exhilaration he could not help feeling at having been chosen by Father to be his companion on this magical trip. He was only eight, and he had never been in the woods before.

The men started in doggedly, measuring the stuff with practised eye, and knowing to the fraction of a pound how much each one could lug.

Son picked out a little load for himself and shouldered it in silence, as they did. He had not gone far before some one came up from behind and deliberately took it away from him.

“Son”

It was Nang, the guide.

Son flushed to the roots of his hair, so humiliated did he feel.

“Here’s just the place left for the tea-pot and the camera,” said Nang’s voice. “Made for it.” He swung the articles in question onto the top of his pile. “Now you run along,” he ordered. “If you get *yourself* over there, you’ll be doing enough.”

Struggling to hide his resentment, Son felt two sharp, bright eyes upon him.

“There’s a beautiful walk near here,” said Nang. “You’d have time to take it while we’re makin’ the first two mile. It’s called the horseback.”

“Good!” said Father, who had overheard. And after obtaining full directions they started off together. A trail brought them to a level ridge, along which Son ran, his hand warm in Father’s, over a path pine-carpeted and elastic with the soft ruin of last year’s leaves, the trees straight and still above him like soldiers on parade, all things hushed and green far nearer than sun or sky, of

The Outlaw

which he was conscious a great way off. When, clinging to the bushes, he ventured to look down, he saw a running stream so far below him that he could not hear the sound of it, and at intervals the shrubbery ceased abruptly, wiped out by the mighty logs that had gone thundering down the slide during the Winter. Son stood awed before these great skidways, where stalwart young saplings had been uprooted, and all the more tender growth lay buried under powdered earth and stones.

“I suppose the big trees were angry,” he thought with a smile, “at being chopped down like that, so they did not care what they killed after they had been pushed over the side.”

The silence was so deep, as he stood there, that, had not his eyes borne witness, he would not have believed it had ever been broken. He put his hand once more in Father's, drawn to the one with whom he was alone in this wonderful and lonely place.

What was that?

“Son”

His heart stood still, for up from the depths had come a startling sound.

They were not alone, they two. Somewhere down there another heart was beating—beating high with a great fear. Something was conscious of their presence—something big. They waited, moving not so much as a finger, for a second of surcharged silence. Then a great body, heedless from terror, plunged splashing into the stream, and annihilating with heavy foot whatever growing thing hindered it in its mad flight, crashed into the thick forest on the other side.

Son had caught no more than a glimpse of two majestic antlers, with such lightning rapidity had the moose vanished. Still he dared not speak, for somewhere among the trees it might be in hiding, with fixed eyes burning red, and breathing hard. Son felt so sorry for it that in its wild home it should be thus frightened by two other live creatures who, without guns, were but delighting harmlessly in this spot of mystery.

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"Come back!" he whispered prayerfully. "I do want to see you so! I'm just a boy, you know, not quarter as big as you!"

He was answered only by a little breeze that swayed lightly the tops of the trees.

"He's gone!" Father sighed regretfully.

And Son sent after him a scarcely breathed "Good-bye!"

They went on, and Son almost forgot the moose. For the other side of the ridge, unsuitable for logging by reason of its gentler slope, was thick with trees, and the moss that clung to their roots was more silvery than the stems of birch trees, or the wrong side of little leaves in Spring. The two clambered down, their feet buried in velvet, and reached the wide dells at the foot, from which the trees stood back because they had wished to leave the moss unbroken and undisturbed. There it ran riot, clinging to every little rise, marking out every miniature valley. Son threw himself down in it and buried his face, but so soft it was that it seemed to melt away

“Son”

beneath his clinging cheek and fingers. When he got up, no imprint marked the place where he had flung his weight.

“I can’t leave it!” he cried out. “Oh, do let’s stay here and sleep to-night!”

Father laughed, looked at his watch, and said they must be turning back.

Then Son remembered the guides. While he had revelled in this paradise, they had been toiling; — Nang had been doing *his* work.

“I was so cross,” he repented. “And if he’d let me do as I liked, I’d never have seen the moose.”

With gratitude warm in his heart he hurried, and as Father took long steps they rejoined the two guides just at the completion of the third trip. All the load was lying at the beginning of the last half-mile stretch, which Nang called the “hayth.” Son, looking at the ungainly bags and bundles spread out among the stumps of trees, began to realize what a two-mile carry meant. Theirs had not seemed much of an outfit to him before,

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but now he longed to leave it by the wayside and do without tents and blankets, since these things must be brought through the wilderness piled on the braced shoulders of men. The "hayth" was a nightmare, for the entangling bushes which hampered the men's feet came up waist high on Son. Also the sun was hot. He went on, setting his teeth. All at once Nang, who was just in front of him, stopped and let his load slide to the ground.

"What's the matter?" asked Son anxiously. "Are you sick?"

He received no reply. In another instant he was in the guide's arms,—then on his shoulder.

"He treats me as if I were a gunny-sack!" thought Son. Still he did not protest, nor was he inwardly very angry, for he remembered who had been the cause of that walk that he could never forget. He knew that through the coming months the thought of it would refresh him like a breath of September air. His little life was barren still of memo-

“Son”

ries, — greatest of all compensations for the piling up of years.

Nang walked on with quick, staccato steps; he never looked back to see who had assumed his discarded burden.

“How did he know,” pondered Son, very sleepy and comfortable, “that I was tired? He couldn’t see me when he was in front.”

Without words, something warm stole from his heart to that of the tense little guide under him. “He *didn’t* see me,” was his thought, “but he knew just the same.”

“How tired *you* must be!” he said finally.

“’Tain’t the first time,” Nang answered shortly.

No one had ever met Son’s advances after this manner before. Yet he did not shrink. The fact was that he understood. “It’s just his way,” he explained to himself.

“Is ‘Nang’ your real name?” he asked.

“Leander,” was the reply. “But folks down where I live ain’t much given to poetry, so I’m Nang.”

When at length the shimmering lake was

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before them, Nang left Son sitting in the shadow of a rock, and went back for a canoe.

Son listened to the lap of the wavelets, and watched the red sun drawing mercifully downwards, wondering how long it would take to disappear behind that black cloud with hard bright edges. He did not feel lonely, for every little while he would discern a figure laboring toward him from far away over the heath, and no one failed to find time for a cheerful word to him before turning back.

There followed such a beautiful night, with soft breeze flapping the tents, and a delicious odor of pine in his nostrils, that Son would have forgotten all about the afternoon's strain had it not been for his friend's face next morning.

There are no gradations in the words. Toil — taxing every nerve and muscle, — rest — perfect and complete. But Nang managed to miss that part of it. For the hard years were telling, and it was the spirit alone that gave to the worn frame still the quality of whalebone.

“Son”

“Didn’t you sleep?” asked Son, while the coffee was making.

“No,” said Nang. “I had the rheumatism bad last night. But *I* heard something that *you* didn’t!”

“Oh, what?” cried Son.

“A deer in the bushes,” said Nang.

And it seemed to Son that this sound, which could hold for him no element of surprise, made up to Nang for all those hours of painful wakefulness.

Son was frightfully hungry. He ate for his breakfast the most extraordinary things,—last night’s beans warmed over, flap-jacks made with Aunt Jemima’s flour, coffee, and soda-biscuit. All were alike good, and gave him a warm, comfortable feeling inside. After breakfast they broke camp, and in an hour, with loaded canoes, were ready to paddle silently away.

That evening Father lingered late on the stream, absorbed in his fishing, and Nang, being in his pay, said nothing, only keeping his eyes on the fine line of gold that marked

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the place where the sun had been. Now he was making bread, while the others wandered up and down aimlessly in the darkness.

"Where are the tent pegs, Nang?" said Father.

"Over there," was the answer, with a quick nod toward the largest gunny-sack. "They're right at the top." He directed Father's fumbling hands.

"Say, have you got the jack-knife?" asked the second guide, peering helplessly.

"It's sticking in that tree where you left it."

"What shall I do with the frying-pan?" questioned Son, who had run up, wishing to be useful.

"Whatever you like," replied Nang irritably.

Son drew back and stood still as a mouse, resolved to ask no more pointless questions.

In this scene of confusion, which might so easily have been avoided by the use of a little forethought, Nang was the moving spirit of order. Son watched in the firelight his

“Son”

strange and weazened face in which the sharp eyes moved restlessly like those of some alert little animal. When Nang looked about for the tin of baking powder, Son shoved it under his hand. Nang's mouth remained set and stern; only the eyes smiled.

“Good boy!” he said shortly.

And Son felt that even at eight years old one could be helpful in the woods. They had done their travelling in the morning, had chosen a camping ground, and dumping the stuff on the bank had started out with light canoes. Son had not fished that afternoon, though he liked to hold in his hands his own feather-weight rod. It had taken all his time to watch the reflections of overhanging maples in the stream ahead, — trees far more distinct than the real ones on the banks, whose leaves broke into red and yellow flutterings when reached by the ever widening circles from the canoes. Son had never thought of fish as creatures to be envied, but to-day he would not have minded changing places with one of the big fellows that he knew were lying with

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unwinking eyes and not so much as a flip of tail at the very bottom of the stream. Always supposing, that is, that he were endowed with their astuteness, to be lured from his pebbly fastnesses neither by Parmachene Belle nor Brown Hackle, skimmed they never so enticingly over the smooth surface of the water. All wood creatures were wary.

Just then there was a sharp crackle; the smouldering logs burst into flame. Son looked up and saw the face of their guide. *All* wood creatures, — including Nang.

The days went on, and Son's impression of Nang did not change. Though there was much about him that was puzzling, he began to feel toward the crotchety little man a loyalty which seemed to have been part of his life for years. He had succumbed to the power of the woods to make intimacies, for a day of companionship in the open is worth a twelvemonth of intercourse in cities.

On Grand Lake he had spent a wondrous night encamped on the beach, where the big moon shone right in on his bed through the

“Son”

open tent-flap, and where all the sands glowed rosy in the early morning; but the other sheets of water, often wind-swept, — Dobsis, Gasabeus, and Nikataus, — depressed him. So much the more he loved the rivers. It filled him with keenest pleasure to watch Nang shooting rapids, standing all alone in his canoe, quick in thought and action, absolute master of the frail thing and knowing exactly how much it would do. Son felt unbounded admiration for the skill which could turn the force of the current so easily to its own uses.

Sometimes he caught an expression on his friend's face that troubled him. It would come at unlooked for moments, as when Nang was steering a loaded canoe across a breezy lake, and his sharp eyes, suddenly fixed, would try to pierce the distant shore, or at night in camp, when they were all sitting about, relaxed and comfortable, and the little man's frame would unexpectedly draw itself together with a snap.

One evening they made camp early, after an exquisite day on sharply winding rivers; and

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the warmth was that of August. Even mosquitoes, whose existence they had forgotten, came to life again in this still place, and Son had to sit close to the smoke of the men's pipes to escape them.

There was much talk after supper, and the second guide astonished Son beyond measure by the ease of his answers to mathematical puzzles propounded by Father. Son disapproved of Father's habit of fastening with avidity upon these problems, and writing them down in a little book for future trial upon man, woman, and child. There was one about Arabs in a desert who fed upon cheeses, which Son particularly disliked, — and he sat by pityingly when Father began to tell it to this guide who had spent his life catching grasshoppers and putting them into a bottle as bait for bass, and who hardly appeared to listen. Then out came the correct answer in a second. And the guide did not seem to think he had done anything at all! Son ever after regarded him with vast respect.

The talk began to turn upon trials and

“Son”

court-room scenes. Nang, who had taken no part in the puzzles, became quickly attentive, and asked many questions as to New York procedure.

“How do you know so much law?” quizzed Father suddenly. He was smoking a good cigar, and was vastly pleased with his audience. “Ever studied it?”

Son did not stop to hear Nang’s answer to this question. He was slightly bored by the conversation, and, besides, he thought he had heard a sound down by the river. If only he could see a moose! He made his way to the bank and stood for a moment absorbed in the beauty of this second sky at his feet, no longer blue as in prosaic daylight, but variegated with greens, yellows, and violets of the most delicate shades. All was still. The broken stalks alone, plentifully sprinkled through the opalescent water and ruthlessly trodden down, told a story of past ecstatic wallowings.

Son turned and started back to camp, as he thought. He could not see the fire, but it

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was over there, — just behind that little hill. Strange that it took so long to get to it! Son could hear talking — and the second guide's, loud laugh. He began to hurry. Then he stopped short. There were no voices any more. What was that? Only the twitter of a bird far away, singing a little sunset song.

Son's heart beat fast. He looked up at the silent trees, bathed in that great light that comes for a moment between day and darkness. How splendid they were, and how cruel! He began to run from one to another. Each group was exactly similar to the one before. Now they were gathering about him, — beginning to press upon him, their outstretched arms closing him in, — always in terrible, inexorable silence. Low bushes clambered up and scratched his face, but he paid no attention to them. He could not breathe. Frantic, he threw his weight against a young pine, and began to beat the slender trunk with his closed fists. It bent gracefully, ever so little, and as soon as the slight pressure was relaxed, it came back and stood

“Son”

utterly still, as if in scorn of this poor futile human energy. Son did not struggle any more. There was no fight left in him. He stood quite as motionless as the big trees, and there was a look on his face in the waning light that did not belong to that of a child.

It was not quite dark when Nang found him. Son heard something coming, — heard a twig or two snap, — but he did not shout, so great was his dread of disappointment. The wrinkled face, whose outlines his straining eyes could just make out coming between the tree trunks, seemed to him the most beautiful in the world. It was a pity that those who knew Nang could not see it, for it had an expression wholly unfamiliar to them.

“Hello!” he said.

Son shuddered, and a violent trembling seized his whole body. He began to cry. “I can’t help it!” he said, ashamed, between sobs.

Nang moved a step nearer.

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"It's nothin' to feel bad over," he said quietly. "Any *man* would do the same. You've had a terrible experience, — bein' lost in the woods."

Son felt the electric thrill of this strange little man's sympathy, and it steadied his over-wrought nerves.

"They were so unkind!" he whispered, half to himself, but in entire confidence that Nang would understand him. He was not disappointed.

"They *would* be," Nang said, looking up at the shadowy trunks — "to *you*."

"Why to me?" said Son.

"Because you've only come to them for your amusement," Nang answered slowly, "and they're not your friends."

"I know they're yours," Son said. "Oh, Nang! tell me what made them be?"

Nang paused before he answered.

"I've lived with 'em and worked with 'em and learned 'em through and through," he said at last solemnly. "I could walk right across the state through them to-morrow,

and come out anywhere I wanted to within ten miles.”

“Cut right through the woods, without paths?” asked Son.

“Right through, — by the sun.”

“Could you go to-night?” Son continued. Nang shook his head.

“Better not,” he said. “When night comes, a woodsman lays down where he is and waits for morning.”

His next words were low and dreamy.

“They’ll do more for a man than that,” he almost whispered. “They’ll swallow him up when there’s need.”

Son felt a little chill down his spine, so queerly gleamed Nang’s eyes in the twilight.

“Let’s go back to the fire,” he said.

Father and the second guide were still smoking and talking about cheeses when they came up.

“Hello!” the latter greeted their arrival. “You were gone quite a spell. Nang thought you might ‘a’ got lost.”

Son could not speak of what he experi-

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enced. He looked at Nang, who likewise kept silence. Idle for once, the latter sat down on a log, chin on hands, and appeared lost in thought.

His preoccupation stopped the easy flow of talk. Son, watching him, longed to penetrate still further than he had done into the mystery of his spirit.

"Oh, Nang!" he cried impulsively, "tell me what you're thinking about."

The little man looked up, startled. Then he smiled sourly. "My thoughts wasn't any too pleasant," he said, and his look was more bitter than the smile it blotted out.

Again Son felt the little chill, and it communicated itself to the others.

"We're all friends here," said Father, looking around. It was as though he expected momentous disclosures.

"I was talkin' to *him*," Nang began, nodding in Son's direction, "about knowin' the woods.

"Up in this country," he went on, "every

“Son”

boy knows 'em, and every man that *is* a man'll fight ter use 'em as he sees fit.”

Nang's meagre voice had gained in depth and volume, as he spoke, making his last words sound peculiarly significant.

“Ten years ago,” he resumed after a pause, “the young men of Machias met together to ask a few pertinent questions. This was one: ‘By what right do a lot of judges sittin’ in a stuffy court house dictate to us what we shall do when we’re out in the woods?’”

His eyes were blazing now, and Son was frightened by the flash of fanatical hatred that distorted his features, breaking down all barriers of reserve.

“Them as sits down every day to their fat dinners,” he cried, his voice no longer deep, but cracked and shrill, — “shall they dare to forbid *us* to kill for food after we’ve walked fifty mile through the wilderness?”

Father was listening attentively, surprised at the facility of expression, the command not only of words but of the thousand tricks of voice and manner that mark familiarity

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with the court room, which came so easily from this untutored woodsman.

“Are they *goin’* ter stop us from catchin’ trout for our supper,” Nang demanded,— “because it happens to be the first of May by their calendar? — That was a second question the young men asked. That’s *their* way of tellin’ the time of year. But we tell it a different way. We tell it by freezin’ in winter and sweatin’ in summer. When the sun sets one night, the law says, ‘Fish if you like!’ And when the sun rises next mornin’ it says, ‘Fish if you dare!’ There they sit, and make it, and write it down in books.”

The excitement died out of his face, and he continued more quietly, —

“The young men of Machias decides that there’s only one answer to such questions. So they builds a fort of logs up the river, and defies, not so much the judges,” — his voice lowered itself, — “but the man who can give the judges cards and spades for meanness, — the feller who takes their pay and comes sneakin’ through the woods to track us down.”

“Son”

The fire flared up; all waited breathless for Nang to go on.

“It was all fight and no quarter fer game-wardens if they came,” said Nang. “*But they didn’t come.*”

“Didn’t they ever?” asked Son.

Nang shook his head, grimly reminiscent.

“Not there,” he said. “There was too many of us. They waited till they caught one alone.”

“Tell us!” begged Son.

“It was Si Weston,” Nang complied, “who was campin’ out one Spring on the west bank of the river. He was all soul alone excep’ fer his two dogs. Then, one day, when he was cookin’ dinner, two of ’em slunk up out of the bushes.

“‘We want you,’ they said.

“‘What fer?’ asked Si.

“‘Doggin’ deer,’ the wardens speaks up.

“Just then the dogs comes around the corner of the camp growlin’ and bristlin,’ seein’ strangers.

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“ ‘Call off your dogs!’ orders the wardens, and points their guns at ’em.

“The dogs was young, and begins to point up their ears and wag their tails, givin’ up their bluff of fight. Si was clean crazy over dogs, always foolin’ with ’em, and spoilin’ ’em fer work. Now he stands up and looks at the wardens.

“ ‘Shoot my dogs if you dare,’ he says, very quiet.

“There was two reports; two little puffs of smoke, and both dogs rolls over on their backs.”

“Dead?” quivered Son.

“One was,” said Nang. “The other lived just long enough to lick Si’s hand when he was bendin’ over him.”

“Go on,” said Father. Son could not speak.

“There ain’t much more to tell,” said Nang.

“What happened to the wardens?” Father asked.

“Si got up and stood between his dogs’

“Son”

bodies,” said Nang quietly, “and shot ’em both dead, — one after the other. They dropped almost together, — went down like logs, without a sound.”

No one spoke for a long time. Then, —

“What became of Si?” asked Father.

“He ran away to California,” said Nang, “and then came back and stood trial, and got off. He’s livin’ in Machias now.”

“It’s like the trees on the horse-back, that killed when they crashed over the side,” thought Son.

In his tent that night he overheard Father and the second guide talking, while Nang was chopping wood at a distance. He did not mean to listen, but between the dull thuds he could not help catching just a word or two at first, and after that he listened feverishly, sitting up.

“Queer fellow,” Father was saying. “He’d have made a cracking lawyer!”

“How did you come to get him?” asked the mathematician, who had been engaged by Father independently, was from a different

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section of the state, and had not escaped the nervous irritation that even the most even-tempered was in danger of feeling after days of contact with Nang.

"The guide I wrote for was engaged," Father answered, "so he recommended Nang. Said there was nobody like him in the woods."

"Ain't nobody like *him* in the whole state o' Maine," returned the other.

Something in his inflection made Father look up.

"How do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"He's been tried fifty-two times fer violatin' the game-laws, and never convicted."

"That accounts for his legal training," was Father's low comment.

The guide continued in a whisper.

"Remember the fire-warden who came through at Gasabeus?" Son heard. "Well, *he* told me Nang was wanted right now fer burnin' down a warden's barn."

"That can't be!" returned Father sharply.

“Son”

“He wouldn’t stoop to arson. I haven’t been with him all this time for nothing.”

“He wouldn’t call it by an ugly name like that,” was the slow reply, “seein’ the barn belonged to a game warden.”

From that night on, Son kept a sort of guard over Nang, and when their trip drew to a close without anything having happened to disturb it, his heart was lightened of a great load.

The last day but two was spent on Nikataus stream, that exquisitely winding thread, where both banks burned scarlet, and each sharp bend was more beautiful than the last. That night Son hoped secretly that he should hear stealthy foot-falls, and when his wish remained unrealized he rejoiced at Father’s decision not to break camp that day. “There’s one more night!” he thought hopefully.

It looked cozy and homelike on the bank, as the keels of the canoes drew up on the pebbles the second afternoon, after a good day’s fishing. Son was so glad the white tents stood there, welcoming, with no poles

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to be cut, and no gunny-sacks to be undone. The next day was to be spent on still another river, — the Passadumkeag, — the last of the trip.

While they were sitting at supper, they heard a sound in the woods. Son turned cold with excitement. Could it be? Of course not. How could he have imagined that a wild animal would seek out the haunts of men in broad daylight?

The low bushes parted, and in their midst stood the new-comer. He was beautiful as a young god, and he stood silent as a statue, drawn up to his great height. Son had plenty of time to look at him, from his curly head and splendid bronzed face, with eyes as blue and gentle as the stream at their feet, to his heavy boots, before he spoke.

“Evenin’,” he said.

“Won’t you have some supper?” Father asked.

“No, thank you, — can’t stop.”

And with that he turned and went back into the bushes. But not without a whispered

“Son”

word to Nang as he passed him by. Nang gave no sigh, — not a muscle moved. So no one saw but Son, who was ever on the watch.

That night Son could not sleep. Heart and mind were full of the errand of their visitor, who had travelled thus silently, not by water, but on foot, for countless miles, with nothing in his hand but an axe, and, his message given, had vanished into the forest whence he had come. The trees had closed behind him as water closes over the head of a drowning man; they held him and his secret in their faithful hearts, and would not tell.

“Nang’s got another friend beside me!” thought Son, grateful, yet a little jealous. “I wish *I* could do something to help him too!”

He longed to be one of those who knew the woods, as these men know them. Though he could not express it, he felt instinctively the mutual dependence of naked man and naked nature. Here man was as he had ever been, brother of the first man Adam who had been made a living soul.

He felt a sickening anxiety for his friend.

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It had come at last, — the urgent message he had been half expecting, wholly dreading.

Had Nang really burned down somebody's barn? That was a very wrong thing to do. Father had called it by one of those names of which he had such a store in his vocabulary.

"But I'm sure there were no cows in it!" he reflected. "Nang would never have done it without taking out the cows. He's too fond of everything alive."

His mind went back to the young men of Machias, of whom Nang, now so broken, had been one but ten years ago; he saw them in their fort of logs, holding it against all comers, bidding them defiantly to come on.

Then he pictured to himself Si Weston, taking calmly a man's life in payment for that of a dog. "It was wicked" he decided, and buried his face. "Oh, the poor dogs!" he sobbed.

The law was right; Father had told him so. Mother's law governed his life. Without it, all would be confusion. But the young men of Machias had decreed it otherwise.

“ Son ”

“ The woods are theirs ! ” Son’s heart insisted in justifying them.

Was ever little boy so torn ?

Father turned in quietly, and for hours after he was asleep Son lay staring into the dark, with a dull ache over his eyes.

He must have slept finally, for all at once he was broad awake, — every sense alert. Something had awakened him, of that he was sure. He had never been afraid of the night, and it held no terrors for him now as he arose and without putting on his shoes crept softly out of the tent.

He stopped to listen, and his straining ears caught a faint sound. A light object was being pushed gently and cautiously into the water. The moon shone with faint and watery gleam, obscured for a moment by a black cloud gliding across it. When it came out, a small, shadowy figure, standing, was pushing a canoe farther and farther out into the stream. It made ready to spring in and then hesitated. Softly, with cat-like footsteps, it turned and left the water’s edge. Son,

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who had drawn back into the bushes, thought Nang must surely hear him breathe.

Nang's eyes were fixed on the tents, gleaming ghostly white above. Outside of Son's he stopped, wavered, and then retraced his steps.

Son knew that Nang had run some risk for that silent farewell. He longed — oh, how he longed, to come out and whisper :

“I'm right here, Nang — right here with you !”

It required a supreme effort for Son to stifle the impulse of his loving heart and remain hidden. Should he make himself known, a whisper might be heard, or precious seconds lost.

Once more the little man reached the water's edge, stepped into his canoe and pushed off. Carefully he let himself down in the bow and dipped in his paddle. The canoe began to move down stream, slowly at first, then gaining speed. There was no sound, for Nang kept his paddle always in the water. Son came out of hiding and

“Son”

watched the canoe until he lost it in distant shadows.

He felt terribly alone. Silence was the law of the woods, — silence when one heard a moose at the foot of a skidway, — silence when one saw a mink's little head peeping out from behind a big rock, — silence when one watched a man stealing away into the night.

Son went back to his tent.

The trees bent toward him on the way, rustled by a sudden breeze, and his sad heart was comforted, for they seemed to tell him that he had done well.

COUSIN LEMUEL

COUSIN LEMUEL



SON was writing a story. This was the beginning of it:

I.

"As the last bell of school rang two boys emerged from the line and walked briskly toward a large group of trees with a pipe sticking out of the top of them. They turned into a path which was nothing but some gravel. As they neared the spot they muttered something and disappeared in between two of the trees. One could have thought they disappeared by magic, but my reader knows the truth, I hope."

Son stopped, and sat biting his pencil. He felt that he was not in the right vein. His reference to the reader seemed to him inartistic, but who was he, after all, that at eight years old he should depart from the model

“Son”

set by most of the boys' books he had read? He went on.

“There was a small hut in those trees, and the pipe was the chimney.”

Son wanted to give the boys' hut the background that he knew, — daisy-dotted meadow, murmuring water, hazy-blue mountains, and white cloudlets gradually cobwebbing a summer sky, for he occupied most of the spare hours of his eight city months in dreaming of the paradise in which he spent the other four. But it was of no use to-day, white wagons rolling and motors puffing outside, and the rain beating down steadily all that weary Sunday afternoon. So he gave up description, and decided to plunge his boys into adventure instead. He brought one of them, after many wanderings, to the door of a summer cottage, and through the kindness of those within, gave him entrance.

“What a castle it was in his eyes!” scribbled Son. “What wonderful tapestries —”

Once more he stopped, tore the sheet across, went over to the window, and stood

Cousin Lemuel

looking out into the dreary street. Then he came back to his little table, and touched with gentle fingers the great yellow pad with its blue lines, which he had borrowed from Father for his literary efforts. There were certain things which made Son's heart beat: piano keys, waiting silent and unobtrusive for the inspired touch; blank pages, suggestive of riotous and wonderful imaginings. Son's eyes filled. There was so much to be done, and he was so small and incapable of doing it. A longing rose in him for companionship, — light of eyes, — touch of hand. In the library, he was aware, it was the hour for drawn curtains, firelight, and tea, — with kettle humming and bubbles in commotion at the bottom, just making up their minds to rise slowly to the surface, one by one. But that was not what he wanted just now! Gradually his vague need took concrete form.

Of course. It was Cousin Lemuel that he wished for. Dear Cousin Lemuel, who on the occasion of his last visit had listened so

“Son”

respectfully to Son's explanation of his latest invention, and had pored over its demonstration on paper for at least half an hour. His comments had consisted merely of “Oh!” “Ah!” and “Indeed!” but they had been perfectly satisfactory to Son. Father had convinced him in five minutes later on that the invention was no good. “His mind is utterly unscientific!” he had remarked discontentedly to Mother.

Son, while accepting Father's verdict, had not been able to resist going over the drawings anew in unoccupied moments, making amplifications and improvements in anticipation of Cousin Lemuel's next visit. He had not come last Sunday, nor the Sunday before. He *must* come to-day!

In the library Mother sat up, looking as though she had never lolled in her life. The bell had tinkled.

“I hope it's not Cousin Lemuel!” she said.

“I *hope* not!” responded Father fervently.

But it was.

Cousin Lemuel

They looked at each other, oblivious of the waiting maid.

"We've got to see him," said Mother.

"I suppose we have," Father replied ruefully.

A silence followed the retreat of the maid, interrupted presently by a slight creaking on the stair. In a moment more the visitor stood in the doorway.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," he said stiffly, his vague blue eyes turning from one to the other of his hosts.

"Not at all!" cried Father in a tone of bluff heartiness that sounded hollow in his own ears.

"How could you think of such a thing!" Mother added lamely.

Though she knew this to be merely Cousin Lemuel's "way," she despaired of being able to guide the conversation out of the channel into which his ineptitude had thrust it. She wished, almost angrily, that he would come in without being urged, and, once in, would sit down without being urged again. "I

“Son”

don't know why he comes at all," she thought. That subtle perception which belongs to childhood, and which, outlasting that period, makes spiritual natures, old or young, did not come to Mother's aid as she looked at Cousin Lemuel's frock-coated figure, his necktie drawn through a gold band with a moonstone in it, his bald head showing pink between shadowy bumps. Her instrument was a sensitive one, with strings at once delicate and powerful, but she had lost the habit of playing on it, and had let the strings get out of tune. It was a pity. For now there was nothing to tell her that this silent, elderly relative, so ill at ease, vibrated to her every look and motion. Into this tall and graceful lady had grown the daughter of his only friend — the child who had used to run to him with open arms and face all dimpled with pleasure. Wonderful!

Absorbed in thought of her he had taken his homeward way three Sundays ago, after supper and a long evening. The night had been fine, so he had walked to his hotel. "I

Cousin Lemuel

can't go next Sunday," he had thought, mechanically holding out his hand across the office counter. The clerk had placed in it an iron key with dangling brass tag. "Nor next Sunday," he had reflected, fitting the key into his lock. "Perhaps the Sunday after," he had pondered, reappearing from within and placing his boots with precision side by side on the threshold. And when the promised day had dawned he had managed to restrain himself yet another week.

"Anyhow," thought Mother, as the three sat on, Cousin Lemuel having declined tea, "we'll escape a whole evening of it. I must tell him pretty soon that we're dining out."

Then Son burst in and saved the situation.

"Cousin Lemuel!" he cried ecstatically. "Oh, you don't know how I wanted you! It's rained all day, and I tried to write a story, but it was horrible, and then I began to wish and wish that you'd come. And I want to explain to you —" He broke off, remembering his unscientific mind. After all, it didn't really matter about the invention. What

“ Son ”

mattered was that Cousin Lemuel was here, holding Son's hand in one of his and patting it softly with the other.

“ Why didn't you send for me ? ” Son said reproachfully to Mother. “ I didn't hear the bell at all ! I've lost all this time. ”

“ Only a few minutes, ” apologized Father, surprised on glancing at the clock to find that he spoke truth.

Son spent the next hour motionless at Cousin Lemuel's side, listening to his occasional remarks on the condition of the stock market, the state of the weather, or the activities of the National Hide and Buckskin Bank, of which he had been the paying teller for more than thirty years. To these last Son lent strict attention, for he had visited Cousin Lemuel once in business hours, and had never forgotten how he had given out crisp bank-notes to a humbly waiting line of people. Ever since, Cousin Lemuel had seemed to him very rich and great.

Son sat faithfully on, though the nerves in his legs had begun to twitch, and the desire

Cousin Lemuel

to change his position amounted almost to physical pain. Finally his supper was announced, and Cousin Lemuel arose,—as a matter of form.

It was an embarrassing moment for Mother. Cousin Lemuel was very sensitive. “Touchy, *I* call it,” Father always said bluntly, when this quality was under discussion.

“If I could only tell him where we’re dining,” Mother reflected, “it would be all right. But I can’t mention Aunt Winifred, for she hasn’t noticed his existence for years.” Mother remembered certain remarks of the redoubtable and witty old woman at Cousin Lemuel’s expense. She felt a twinge of conscience, for they had made her smile.

“I’m *so* sorry,” she said nervously, “we’re going out to dinner. But you mustn’t think of leaving yet. Please sit down again.”

Cousin Lemuel remained standing, and quickly drew himself together. His voice trembled a little when he spoke.

“I must be going,” he said. “It’s getting late.”

“Son”

There was an uncomfortable pause.

Then Son came up, and lifted his face to Cousin Lemuel's. His whole heart was in his eyes.

“Come and have supper with Baby and me,” he said. “Please do! Oh, Mother, let him stay!”

Mother caught at the suggestion eagerly.

“*Do*, Cousin Lemuel!” she cried. “It would be such a delight to the children.”

By the time they had succeeded in persuading him to do what he desired, the cereal had ceased smoking and had in fact grown so cold that it had to be sent to the kitchen again. But that was a detail.

Mother, who went down with them, did not fail to catch Cousin Lemuel's suspicious glance through the dining-room door, nor his look of relief at seeing that the big table was not set. “How lucky I didn't order their supper in the nursery!” she thought. Then she excused herself hurriedly and ran off to dress, for Aunt Winifred kept early hours.

Cousin Lemuel

Father was upstairs already, banging about.

“Thank Heaven I haven’t any relative like that!” he called out savagely from his room, ripping off his collar.

Mother took out two shell hairpins without reply, and he felt that he had scored.

“How about your great-aunt Susan in Worcester!” she then called out sweetly.

The rest of the dressing was accomplished in silence. Meanwhile things were going smoothly in the dining-room. The meal over, Baby, pleased at company, graciously consented to accompany the visitor back to the library, and even to sit on his knee, from which precarious slope she slid down at the end of half a second. Then she went away without ceremony to her own domain, having decided at a glance that Cousin Lemuel was not of those who may be fed, driven, or stalled in corners behind sofas, and was therefore unsuited to her purposes.

At last Son’s time had come. With a sigh of content he got out his stamp collection, and holding the big book under his arm,

“ Son ”

settled himself on the sofa, drawing Cousin Lemuel down beside him.

“ Did *you* ever collect stamps? ” asked Son, opening the volume on his knees.

Cousin Lemuel shook his head. But he looked long and earnestly at every page, as Son turned each slowly, expounding and explaining. In this collection he and Father were at present equally absorbed, and many an hour had the two spent over it in happy comradeship, satisfying a common interest in lands and people far away.

“ What did *you* do when you were a little boy? ” asked Son finally, closing the book.

Cousin Lemuel drew his brows together, trying to gather up memories of that forgotten time.

“ Never mind! ” cried Son. “ Did you ever travel? ”

“ Yes, ” said Cousin Lemuel, brightening.

“ Oh, where? ” Son asked. “ I wish *I* could! Tell me about it. ”

“ I went to Bermuda once, — about twenty years ago, ” was the reply.

Cousin Lemuel

“What was it like?”

“Very nice,” said Cousin Lemuel. “I used to sit on the hotel piazza and watch the young ladies and the young gentlemen playing lawn tennis. It was very gay.”

“Was it pretty in that country?”

Cousin Lemuel pondered a moment. It had never occurred to him to classify what passed under his eyes in this way, since there had been no one to question him as to his impressions. He would have liked to satisfy Son.

“The roads were straight,” he began tentatively. “They were made of broken oyster shells.”

He looked at his interlocutor narrowly, fearing his disappointment. But Son was filling in the meagre outlines for himself.

“I know what grows in the tropics!” he said. “You must have seen palm trees!”

“Oh, yes, there were palms,” agreed Cousin Lemuel. “Palms, of course.”

And when Son’s bedtime came the old man was thinking of oyster shells no longer,

“Son”

but of trees whose forms were quaint and curious and whose shade was deep.

About three weeks after this, Mother came in one afternoon, tired out. She had been motoring, and an hour from home had come a light snow-flurry. The chains had been left behind, and the machine had skidded continually.

“There’s nothing that gets on my nerves like skidding,” Mother announced to Father, as they finally descended in safety.

“That’s obvious,” Father wanted to retort, but he refrained. “I’m going in next door to speak to Holworth for a minute,” he said instead.

“I won’t see *any one*,” Mother directed the maid who opened the door. “Say I’m not at home.” She turned for a moment to give another order, and then ran upstairs.

It was that instant’s turning that did all the damage.

Cousin Lemuel, just rounding the corner, saw the motor at the house and hurried his

Cousin Lemuel

footsteps. A shy pink showed in each cheek, and his blue eyes had lost their vagueness. He was quite breathless when he reached the steps. The door was uncurtained, for Mother was still waiting to pick up a piece of Italian lace for it at auction. Through the polished glass he could see, furred and glowing rosy in spite of the state of her nerves, her whom he loved as a daughter, and to whom he always referred in his inmost thoughts as his "little girl." His pulses quickened when she looked toward the door and saw him, as he thought. He raised his hand to his silk hat and pressed the bell. A moment later he was descending the steps, having carefully dropped two pasteboards into an extended card tray.

The maid watched him in some uneasiness of mind. Mother's tone had been petulant, — an unusual circumstance which allowed her no exercise of discretion. What was to be done?

"Would you like to see the children, sir?" she bethought herself of calling out.

“ Son ”

“ No, I thank you,” he answered her with distant courtesy. “ Some other time. Not to-day — not to-day.”

Son saw the cards on the tray when he went down to supper. He ran into the pantry at once to make inquiries, but could not find the parlor-maid, who was in her own quarters, engaged in those long and serious preparations that are a necessary adjunct to an evening out. He ran up to Mother's room next. There was a slip pinned to the door bearing in her neat handwriting the words “ Do not knock.” He stood there, baffled, — a poor little Adam, barred out of his Garden of Eden by flaming swords.

Mathilde insisted on his going to bed early because he had not eaten his supper and must therefore be ill. Could she have ministered to his heart as she did to his body, what a *wonderful* person she would have been, this Mathilde, who sat outside his door until half-past ten and then went to bed with conscience clear, having done her whole duty as she saw it.

Cousin Lemuel

Son could not sleep. If Mother was out when Cousin Lemuel came, why hadn't Mary brought him up to the nursery to wait for her?

Cousin Lemuel was awake, too, in his room at the hotel. He had not even begun to undress. He was thinking strange thoughts for him.

The hall boy, coming along to collect the shoes, did not find any outside of Cousin Lemuel's room, so he passed on to the next.

When Son obtained an explanation from Mary, it was only a partial one. For who could have guessed that the poor old gentleman would fail to realize the impossibility of seeing from the lighted hall any one standing without, in the gathering darkness of the short winter afternoon?

Mother laughed at Son's anxieties when he confided them to her. "You carry the burdens of the whole world on your shoulders," she said. But she wrote a note to Cousin Lemuel, inviting him to dinner on the following Sunday, and left it herself at the hotel.

“Son”

Next morning when she opened her mail Son was at her elbow.

“Is there an answer?” he queried.

“Answer to what?” she replied absently.

“No, there isn’t. Run along.”

“She didn’t know what I was talking about,” he thought sorrowfully, as he went.

When he came home from school he found that she had gone to Philadelphia with Father on one of those sudden business trips she was always ready to join.

Son stood in the confusion of her room, and watched her maid putting things to rights. He picked up one of her handkerchiefs, — a pretty feminine thing of lace and embroidery that somehow made the room seem more motherless than before. It was not good to be a child. For people left you all alone with anxieties that they did not even know you had.

It was on Saturday that Mother returned.

“Has the letter come?” Son asked her gravely.

This time she did not inquire what he

Cousin Lemuel

meant, but began at once to search through the pile that had accumulated during her absence.

"I haven't come to it yet," she said, trying to speak reassuringly. "But it's here, of course. I'll find it in a minute."

It was not to be found.

"I'm afraid he's ill," she said.

"I don't think so," Son answered. "Perhaps he thought you didn't want to see him," he added slowly.

"How stupid of him!" she exclaimed in some impatience. "But I must send and look him up. How would *you* like to go?"

"It's not *me* he wants," said Son. "It's you. Oh, Mother, he loves you so!"

An expression of utter incredulity crossed her face.

"Why, no, he doesn't," she said. "What put such an idea into your head?"

Son put his arms around her neck and hugged her tight.

"Do you think that's so funny?" he asked.

"Oh, Son, Son!" she cried, burying her

“Son”

face on his shoulder. “I don’t know anything. Tell me!”

Son loved the little perfumeless perfume of Mother’s clothes as he sat beside her in the motor, the tilt of her hat, the feel of her glove when his hand touched it, for her eyes looked to him and her heart beat in tune to his as she took over the burden he had carried unaided all these days.

Her world looked so different in the light that this last half-hour had cast that she was scarcely surprised at the information given in a matter-of-fact tone by the clerk at the hotel office. Still she did not seem able to think what to do. For many minutes she stood there, staring.

“He was here for years,” volunteered the clerk at length, moved to sympathy. “Long before *I* came. We asked if there was any dissatisfaction, and he said ‘None at all.’ Just paid his bill and left.”

“Thank you,” said Mother, and turned away. “We shouldn’t find him at the bank, — it’s after hours,” she whispered to Son.

Cousin Lemuel

"We'll go home and telephone Father. That's the best thing to do. He went directly to his office from the train."

While she telephoned Son stood by, and in his presence she controlled her agitation and spoke quietly.

"He'll ring me up as soon as he finds out," she said, hanging up the receiver. "He's going to talk to Mr. Janeway — that's the president of the bank — if he's in town."

They waited in suspense for ten long minutes. When the call came, Son, watching Mother's, face saw it turn white.

"What is it?" he cried in dread.

"I'm afraid," she answered, and wished that she had not.

When she had finished talking she arose, and with both hands on Son's shoulders stood looking down at him.

"Mr. Janeway doesn't know where he is," she said. "Cousin Lemuel has resigned."

Still looking at him, she perceived that he had failed to understand. He was such a little boy. She was always forgetting that.

“Son”

“He isn’t there any more,” she explained gently. “Behind the little window, you know.”

This time Son understood. He was almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of this disaster. It made Mother’s heart ache to see how he trembled.

“Don’t!” she said, drawing him within her arms. “Oh, Son! he must have been very unhappy to give up his work!”

“Why did they *let* him? How *could* they?” Son’s voice was sharp with indignation.

Mother’s face hardened. Son had never seen it look so stern.

“They didn’t want him any more. He was old and slow. They were glad of an excuse.”

She looked into Son’s hurt, shocked face, and everything in her melted.

“Perhaps they didn’t *know*,” she said, and added humbly, — “like me.”

Then she gave him a hurried kiss, as if she had just remembered that there were things to be done.

Cousin Lemuel

"I've got to go and meet Father," she said.
"I'll be back soon."

"Aren't you going to take me?" he asked, aghast.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "I can't tell what—" She shuddered at her thought, and went out.

Never had Son felt so utterly alone. There were no sounds, even from the street. He, too, must do something, or his heart would break. But what? In his despair words came back to him,—words in Mother's voice.

"Perhaps they didn't know."

They must be told, then! Son's face cleared, and his eyes shone, as he ran over to the desk and began busily turning the leaves of the telephone book. Janeway. That was the name! But which? There were so many Janeways in the book. He must go down the list. That was all.

Son went at it with his customary attack, brows knit and forefinger laboring. There was nothing on the page about bank presidents. Grocers, tailors, doctors—Yes.

“Son”

Bank presidents — No. Through the names of all the Janeways whose occupations were indicated, he drew a line in pencil.

“I’ll have to call up the rest,” he decided.

His fifth attempt succeeded. But, alas! Mr. Janeway, the right Mr. Janeway, who was indeed a bank president, was out.

“Oh, please,” implored Son desperately, “tell me where he is!”

Fortunately for Son it was the afternoon in of the Janeway butler. He was a human butler, fond of boys.

“He’s at a directors’ meeting,” came the prompt answer. “There’s a directors’ meeting at the bank at five. Who shall I say —”

The butler stood nonplussed. He had been cut off.

“It was a little lad,” he reflected, “and he wanted Mr. Janeway bad. Talked like a man, too. So I answered him like one.”

In the private office of the president, at a table of San Domingo mahogany, sat the officers of the National Hide and Buckskin

Cousin Lemuel

Bank. They were very black as to coats and very white as to collars, and if there were hearts under their waistcoats they were not conscious of them. For the heart is a negligible quantity when it comes to a directors' meeting.

"Gentlemen," began Mr. Janeway, "as we have a great deal of business to attend to, we had better come to order."

The gentlemen moved slightly and fixed their eyes on the speaker.

"The first matter before us," continued the president, "is the resignation of Mr. Lemuel Patterson, our paying teller."

He paused. Hearing no comments, he went on.

"This was made in a manner somewhat unusual,—to use no harsher term. Last Monday morning, without notice, and during my absence in Pittsburg Mr. Patterson remained away from the bank. He made no explanation whatever. In the shortest possible note, addressed to me and mailed to my house, he stated that he wished to resign.

“Son”

Nothing more. The note was not forwarded, and it was therefore not until my return to-day that I received it.”

“Casual!” remarked the vice-president.

“So it appeared to me,” said Mr. Janeway coldly. “It seems,” he added, “that his relatives did not know of it until to-day, either. He has moved, and they were looking for him not two hours ago. They have undoubtedly found him by this time.”

“How are the books?” a voice asked sharply.

A few crows’ feet shaped themselves about Mr. Janeway’s eyes.

“I lost no time in examining them,” he said. “They are perfect.”

“What possible motive . . .” mused the vice-president.

But Mr. Janeway was glancing at the memoranda before him on the table. The motives actuating old paying tellers in performing out-of-the-way actions concerned him not at all.

“We all know, gentlemen,” he resumed in a

Cousin Lemuel

tone of finality, "Mr. Patterson's—er—limitations. We have had many years in which to familiarize ourselves with them. Now, if you agree with me that a little new blood —"

He stopped short, displeased. Some one had dared to knock at the door.

"Come in!" he ordered.

He was prepared to make short work of the intruder. But so great was his surprise when, in obedience to his summons, the door opened and admitted a small boy, that his mantle of austerity fell from him, leaving nothing to distinguish him from eleven other solemn and dignified personages in Son's eyes.

"Please excuse me for interrupting," said Son, trying to pick out his man. "It's very important."

"Let's have this important business," said Mr. Janeway, with an unmistakable smile. "But first—may I ask how you got in?"

So that was the president,—the man of power. And he wasn't cross a bit!

"That was easy!" Son answered with a

“Son”

little laugh, forgetting for an instant in his relief the importance of his errand,—“I’m so small. I just slipped in behind the man who was closing up the grating. He never saw me!”

“Who told you where to come?”

“I walked along until I heard voices. Then I knew the meeting must be in here.”

A gleam of interest showed on the faces of the seated ones.

“How did you find out that there was a meeting?” asked Mr. Janeway.

“They told me at your house,—over the telephone. I *had* to speak to you, so I came right down. I knew the way, because I’ve been here before—to see Cousin Lemuel.”

Mr. Janeway began to understand. “Oh!” he said.

Son’s face had suddenly grown intent. No more social amenities! Too much time had been spent already in preliminaries.

“I came to tell you about him,” he said.

“Go on,” the president answered.

Son struggled for expression. He looked

Cousin Lemuel

around, and every face was kind. That made it easier!

“Oh, Mr. Janeway!” he burst out, “if Cousin Lemuel didn’t have the bank — I think he’d die.”

No one spoke.

Son went on. “He’s told me about it often,” he said. “Every morning he wakes early, and then he lies with his watch in his hand, he’s so afraid he might go to sleep again and be late. The bank’s all he has, except Mother, and he only comes to see her once in a while, — on Sundays. He has the bank *every* day!”

Son stopped and came up close to Mr. Janeway’s chair.

“You didn’t know!” he said. “You couldn’t — of course. Cousin Lemuel never told you. But he thinks about the bank all the time. He can’t even remember what he used to do before he came here.”

So deeply in earnest was Son that he never noticed Mr. Janeway’s arm put gently about him.

“Son”

“It’s all a mistake!” he cried, his eyes filling. “Cousin Lemuel wouldn’t have left for the world. Only he didn’t care what he did, he was so unhappy. It was all because he thought Mother didn’t want him — when she really did. *Nobody* wanted him, he thought. Not Mother — or you — or anybody in the world. But you *do*, don’t you?”

Son was hanging on Mr. Janeway’s face with eyes and lips and all his being.

There was a heavy silence.

Then, “Yes,” said Mr. Janeway, putting his other arm around Son.

“I knew it!” cried the latter, almost delirious with joy. He quivered with the excitement of reaction from his previous uncertainty.

“Will you go and explain to Cousin Lemuel?” said Mr. Janeway, to steady him.

Son’s face fell.

“We’ve got to find him first,” he answered.

“Isn’t he found *yet?*” shouted the president, springing up so suddenly that he overturned his chair. “Gentlemen, you will

Cousin Lemuel

excuse me. An important matter. Mr. Woodrough will take my place."

The vice-president, to whom he referred, had arisen, and was engaged in picking up the chair that had been knocked over. "It's broken," he muttered. "Go along, Janeway."

Mr. Janeway went, holding Son by the hand.

The whereabouts of Cousin Lemuel were discovered in the end by a simple expedient. It was Mother who thought of it, when she and Father drew up before the hotel, and saw a line of hacks standing near the entrance.

"Why not ask the cabmen?" she said.

Poor Cousin Lemuel had not used much skill in covering his tracks. He had only wanted to get out of the way, like a hurt animal that retires without outcry to nurse its wounds as best it may. It did not take ten minutes to unearth the very man who had transferred him and his trunk to their new quarters.

Cousin Lemuel had just passed the sixth

“Son”

longest day of his life. Waking early, he had taken his watch from under his pillow by force of habit, and had held it in his hand, musing. As he observed for the millionth time the delicately chiselled gold face, his thoughts went back to that good friend whose gift it had been, Son's maternal grandfather,—cousin by blood,—brother by a heart's need. Of his relatives this one alone had never failed him, loyal in full and prosperous years to the companion of his youth. Gone long ago. What business had that old pain of loss to crop up again to-day?

He put the watch back and tried to lie still a few more minutes. Then he gave it up, dressed, and went down to breakfast. He still shrank from the new waiter who served him in the new dining-room, and ordered a boiled egg that he might swallow it quickly, though it was his habit to eat two lamb chops every morning.

The meal over, he took his hat and went out briskly, with every appearance of haste. Once around the corner his steps faltered

Cousin Lemuel

and became quite slow and feeble, as they had every day that week.

He was deadly tired when he came in to lunch. Going out again afterwards was not to be thought of. He went up to his room, where no eye of stranger was upon him, and sat down. Hour after hour he sat there, neither moving nor thinking. When there came a knock at the door, he did not rouse himself to answer.

"They've got the wrong room," he thought listlessly. "It's for some one else."

Then a shiver went through his frame, and he straightened in his chair.

"Cousin Lemuel!" cried two or three voices in confusion outside.

It was Mother who opened the door. He got up, took two steps toward her, swayed a little, and in the sudden dark that blotted her out felt her two arms about him.

"He'll be all right in a minute," he heard. "Only a little faintness. Turn on the lights!"

Cousin Lemuel, coming back into full consciousness, kept his eyes closed. Which were

“Son”

better,—to feel her, still kneeling beside the chair in which they had placed him, or to look at her and have her get up? His decision was not made when some one spoke. Cousin Lemuel opened his eyes, and saw for the first time the rest of the group,—Father, Mr. Janeway, and Son, the two latter having gone directly from the bank to the old hotel, where they had encountered the others.

“The officers of the bank have commissioned me to decline your resignation,” said Mr. Janeway.

“Mother didn’t see you in the hall!” cried Son.

Cousin Lemuel patted Mother’s head. Since she was still kneeling beside him, what matter whether she had seen him or not?

“Let us take you home to dinner!” begged Father.

Cousin Lemuel shook his head. He was very tired.

“I’ll come on Sunday,” he said.

Then he arose, took off his watch, leaving the useless chain dangling, and with old-

Cousin Lemuel

fashioned formality put the watch into Son's hand.

"Oh, no! No!" cried everybody.

But Cousin Lemuel glowed. "I've always intended it for him," he said. And he looked so happy as he stood there, with pink in his cheeks and blue in his eyes, that they dared protest no more.

"Let's go," whispered Mother. "He's had excitement enough."

"We'll see you at the bank on Monday. Good-bye!" said Mr. Janeway.

"Good-bye!" echoed Father and Son.

Mother, who had suggested going, lingered. "Good-bye, dear!" she said.

"Good-bye," whispered Cousin Lemuel. "Good-bye, my little girl!"



THE REFLEX

THE REFLEX



SON passed it every morning on his way to school. It was an ugly red brick building, and any one could have told that it had been erected with charitable intent. It had all the indications. Son had often seen some shy little old head appear at one of the windows, to be withdrawn at the next instant.

"Why don't they build a lot of *little* houses for them?" he thought in happy ignorance of the value of real property in the City of New York. "White wooden ones, with green blinds?" And he saw in his mind innumerable tiny kitchens, smelt savory smells from imaginary lacquered stoves, and pictured in each toy house an owner, important, happy, holding in black bombazine undisputed sway over her own hearth. "That is the way I should do it!" thought Son.

He liked hospitals: it seemed right that

“Son”

sick people should be cared for in long rows of white cots, to be discharged when cured. But from this great, solid building there was no discharge, and for the ailment which had brought each inmate there, — age, — there was no cure. Potential grandmothers all, — checked and pigeon-holed. Son's soul rebelled. What a waste!

Son did not possess a grandmother himself. Perhaps it was just as well in these modern days, — for, who knows? — had he owned one she might not have had little gray curls at all, but a coiffure in the latest fashion, and clothes to match. This would have been fatal, for somewhere in the recesses of his mind was a very exact idea of what an old lady should be. Toward this old lady of his dreams he had a feeling, not quite the same as his love for Baby, nor yet like his tenderness for Fulsy, — Fulsy, his own puppy, whom he had given to Nils' boy Petersen, and whom he still longed for at night with empty arms, — but similar to both. So he was not at all surprised, in looking up one

The Reflex

day as he passed by, to see her peeping out. There she was! Black dress, gray curls, and all. And he took off his cap and waved it at her with a bright smile of recognition.

"Mais, quoi donc?" cried Mathilde, grabbing him by the shoulder and hurrying him along.

Son did not often stop to analyze Mathilde. He accepted her as he did the Indian meal mush which was sometimes served to him for breakfast. He did not fancy it, but he ate it because of a tradition in his family which proclaimed it superior in sterling qualities to pleasanter foods. This time he thought her over, and concluded that her interference had sprung, not from any objection to the old ladies,—to whom she would joyfully have rushed with arms full of packages of any size, had such been entrusted to her for them,—but from an ineradicable conventionality of temperament. She never allowed Son to make acquaintances. How, then, enlarge his horizon? That night he asked Mother whether he might not be permitted in future

“Son”

to go to school alone. It was not his fault that his motives were misinterpreted.

“He’s getting manly at last!” cried Father in triumph, when the request was repeated to him by Mother during the evening.

“But the automobiles—”

“Nonsense!” Father interrupted. “He can take care of himself.”

“He’s so little—”

“Didn’t want to be seen with a nurse! Quite right, too!” Father said, not listening. And in this fashion he disposed of all further arguments.

Son started off very happily next day, his books under his arm, while Mathilde watched him from a third floor window.

“Not’in’ more for me to do in *dis* house,” she grumbled to the housemaid. Then she took up the jacket he had worn last night from the hanger, where it had waited with the sleeves full of creases made by his arms, and began to brush it energetically.

That day Son did not see his old lady, but the following morning she was there, leaning

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out of an upper window with a green flower-pot in her hand. Son stood quietly waiting until she had watered the whole row of pink tulips that lifted their heads with such delicate stiffness, making the only spot of color on the dreary face of the "home." When the last drop had been sucked into her little bit of brown earth, she looked down, saw him, and leaned out perilously far, waving to him as quickly as though she had been another boy.

After he had gone on she continued to stand there, though she knew he was caught behind some sternly shut door, where people were trying to put into his head a thing that they called knowledge. He would not come back for hours.

By and by the dinner bell rang. She went down with the others, and left as soon as it was over. There he was again! Waving his cap! Laughing! Running by.

Had she really waited all that time with the single interruption of the mid-day meal, hovering between the window and her chair? Well, it didn't matter, after all. For she had

“Son”

watered her flowers, and, apart from eating, there was nothing else to do.

After that Son knew that as regularly as he got up, as regularly as he ate his breakfast and started out, he should see her, — going and coming.

And the old lady, nestling about in the early morning on the coarse clean pillow case which was marked in ink in one corner, “Unsectarian Home, No. 568,” — at that pleasant moment which comes between sleeping and waking, would feel that something delightful was about to happen — Christmas, or something of the sort.

Sunday, which had been for years an eventful day to her, and the occasion of much innocent prinking before she started out, ivory prayer-book in hand, for church, was now a weariness. That and Saturday. For on those days he did not come. She had forgotten holidays.

There was one holiday to which she looked forward from year to year with a stirring of the pulses at the mere thought of it. On

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that day she always got out a little silk flag that she numbered among the dearest of her possessions, and hung it out of the window, where above the row of tulips it fluttered valiantly in the breeze,—Lincoln's birthday.

This time she felt like a traitor to her dear hero, that on his day, instead of soaring, her heart sank. But she fastened her flag in its place, thinking all the while, "He's not coming. He won't come to-day."

And then he did come, after all, — came with his school books under his arm, and his cap on the back of his head, at an angle never tolerated by Mathilde. But she was away on an unheard-of holiday — gone to meet at the dock a sister newly arrived — and Father and Mother were away too, on a motoring trip. Son, who was often absent-minded, had clean forgotten what day it was. He never remembered it until he looked up and saw the old lady standing listlessly beside the stars and stripes. He laughed outright. "How funny!" he said aloud. "Why, there isn't any school to-day!" Then

“Son”

his eyes met those of his friend, shining down at him.

“There isn’t any school to-day!” he shouted, making a trumpet of his hollowed hands.

She beckoned, and quick as thought Son had run up the front steps. He was just going to ring the bell when the door was opened. “How did she ever get here so soon?” thought Son. “But she can move fast — she’s not so much bigger than me.”

“How do you do?” he said politely, removing the rakish cap.

“I’m so glad you came, after all!” she answered with a little sigh of pleasure. “Will you come up to my room?”

Hand in hand they trotted up the uncarpeted stairs, — she softly, he with a creditable clattering of little stout shoes.

“Whew!” he said. “Perhaps they won’t like me to make such a noise!”

But she assured him that “they” would.

At the end of the second flight the two stopped, and turning to the right came to

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one of many wooden doors just alike. "No. 301" was painted on it in black letters.

"That's my house-number!" she said, as she opened the door.

There was one window, through which the sun was coming in. Son caught the pink glow of the tulips on the sill.

"I'm glad the sun's shining!" he consoled himself, looking about the bare space. A little white iron bedstead in one corner, a bureau in another. A mission table without a cloth occupied the centre of the room, and there were two chairs and a footstool. Under the window was a worn black leather trunk. That was all. No,—not quite all. On the whitewashed walls were hanging, not pictures, but bits of handwriting in neat oak frames.

Son's old lady followed the direction of his eyes.

"Can you read?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," he replied.

She took him to a chair under one of the frames, held his hand while he climbed up,

“Son”

and pointed with a tapering forefinger at the manuscript displayed.

“ALBANY, Feb. 18, 1861.

DEAR ANN, —

Having a moment's leisure at this locality I write to you. Old Abe has just now been received here. His journey to the Capital is to be a success. The people are rising en masse — the further he goes the greater will be the numbers. At this place there were at least fifteen thousand in the crowd. The park at the Capital here was every inch of it packed, and all the trees were filled with living beings. If you have not seen Lincoln you will be disappointed on seeing him. With his present heavy beard he is really a noble-looking man. His likenesses are decidedly a mistake — ”

“That's true!” interrupted the old lady softly.

Son turned, and with both hands on the rim of the chair looked down on her absorbed, upturned face.

“Did *you* ever see him?” he asked.

“Yes, after I had received that letter I started at once for Washington, and saw him for myself when he arrived.”

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"Tell me about the war!" pleaded Son, jumping down.

"It's a long story," she warned.

"Oh, good!" he cried clapping his hands. "*Please* begin. But first—where's your knitting?"

"How do you know that old ladies have to knit?" she said happily, going over to the bureau and getting it out of the upper drawer. "They always do, you know!"

"Of course," he said. "What beautiful stockings! Who are they for?"

"For soldiers," said the old lady, dropping instantly her bantering tone and lowering her voice.

"Soldiers in barracks?"

"No, soldiers at war," she replied.

"But we're not having war in this country!" he cried, wondering.

"This is not the *only* country," she reproved him gently. "Somewhere—who knows—they may be needed when they are finished."

Son watched her, awed, for her breath

“Son ”

came quickly, and her eyes were alight with what he knew to be Mother-love for all the soldiers in the whole world.

She settled herself in the rocking-chair and offered him the footstool, but he pushed it under her feet and sat down on the floor, clasping his drawn-up knees with his hands and leaning his chin on them.

“Tell me,” he pleaded.

“Once upon a time,” she began thoughtfully, “there lived a girl. She was almost grown up, you know, but she was little.”

“Where did she live?” said Son, all expectation.

“She lived in a white house,” said the old lady, “with green blinds.”

“Just the kind I love!” cried Son ecstatically. “With roses. There were roses?” he added with some anxiety.

“Crimson ramblers,” said the old lady promptly.

Son unclasped his knees with a sigh of satisfaction. “Go on, please,” he said.

“She lived with her aunt,” his friend con-

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tinued. "A quiet, kind aunt, who had never been out of her native village. The girl liked school. After the primary came the high school, and she graduated with honors. And the minister of her church, who had lived in cities, told her what books to get from the library. She read a great deal,—mostly history, and the biographies of great men. Then came a rather dreary time. Her school days were over, and she did not wish to read any more of the events in busy lives. She used to lean out of her little window in the gray of morning, when the air was still and heavy with the sweet garden odors below, and wish that something would stir.

"‘Things may happen to other people,’ her heart would cry out, ‘but not to me!’”

"Did anything?" asked Son.

"Yes," said the old lady joyously. "Into this Sabbath quiet came—a man."

"What kind of a man?"

"Just a man! A great, big young man, who could lift the girl with one hand and put her

“Son”

over the fences when they were walking together through the fields. All the things that the girl had long since forgotten to notice gave him the keenest pleasure. The tolling bell on the old white church, the gay colors of the garden flowers, the smell of hay, and the singing of birds at sunrise. She learned to see them all with his eyes.

“But most of all he loved the elms. By day, when the sun cast late afternoon shadows over them, or at night, when they stood, silent sentinels under a round yellow moon, while the glistening mist rose in great clouds over the marshes.”

“Then what happened?” said Son.

“Well, one day the man took the girl’s hand and led her up the straight aisle of the church, where the minister who had directed her reading married them, with the aunt and all her school friends looking on from the high-backed pews.

“That very day he took her away,—and, oh, she was glad to go! But through the anxious days that followed, he looked back

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to that sleepy little town as to an earthly paradise."

The old lady paused, and Son did not interrupt her thoughts.

"The war broke out almost at once," she resumed presently. "And of course the man volunteered." She got up and began fumbling over papers in the trunk. "This will tell you the beginning of it," she said, coming back with a folded sheet in her hand. And she began to read:

"Head Quarters, First Division.

Gen. Williams (late Banks) Corps.

MARYLAND HEIGHTS, September 24th, 1862.

GEN. A. A. WILLIAMS,
Commanding Corps.

SIR, —

In conformity with orders, emanating from Headquarters of the Corps, I have the honor to report upon the part taken by my Brigade, the Third, of the First Division of your Corps, in the recent battle of Antietam, near Sharpsburg, on the 17th instant.

The enemy, routed at passes of the South Mountain on the 14th, were rapidly pursued and brought to a stand, near Sharpsburg, on the westerly side of Antietam Creek, on the 16th instant — "

“Son”

“I’d rather have you tell it!” said Son.

“Perhaps you *are* a little young for the official reports,” the old lady replied. “But you look as though you could understand anything.

“All that day the Corps had nothing to do. So they spent it—nearly all of them—in writing letters. One letter came—long after—to a wife.”

“What did it say?” asked Son.

“Pages and pages of—things that you wouldn’t understand,” she replied. “But it ended with this:

“‘If I shouldn’t come back, I’d like to think of you in their keeping—the big fellows that listened to all I whispered to you that night.’”

“The elms!” Son said.

“There’s a lot more in the report,” said the old lady. “About how they were awakened from a brief sleep by a sharp firing of musketry—how General Hooker was sorely pressed, and General Gordon brought his Brigade to his support—how he moved his plied masses at double quick—”

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“Oh!” cried Son, “if I could only have been there! It doesn’t sound like that in my ‘Children’s Stories in American History’! Mother read me something out of the Bible that sounded like it. What was it now? Oh, yes, I know, ‘The thunder of the Captains, and the shouting.’”

Son looked up, but the old lady did not go on. He shuffled his feet, and she looked down at him smiling.

“May I read a little now?” she asked. “I’m afraid I couldn’t tell this part.”

She turned several pages, and the leaves crackled.

“These regiments,” she read, “were received with a galling fire, which they sustained and returned for a brief period, then fell back upon their supports. So strong was the enemy that an addition of any force I could command would only have caused further sacrifice without gain. The loss in the 2d Mass. was severe. Here fell mortally wounded Lieutenant-Colonel Winfield Graham of this Regiment bravely fighting for his country.

“An official paper is not the place to express the sadness the death of this gallant officer brings to the Regiment in which his presence was so much felt, as

“Son”

well as to many friends serving in the army, to whom — ”

“But no one must be killed *now!*” interrupted Son, his eyes filling. “Why, it’s only the beginning of the story!”

The old lady looked down into his disappointed face, and her smile was the sweetest he had ever seen.

“It’s the end of *my* story,” she said.

Son went home, and all that day forgot to do everything that was expected of him, for he smelled the battle afar off. In the afternoon the streets were gay with flags. He longed passionately to do some deed of heroism, — to sacrifice his life, if need be. Mother and Father came home toward night, and Son went down to say his prayers. Instead of mumbling them off as usual, with the pleasant feeling that the doing of it was sure to rob the night of cares, he faltered in the middle and stopped.

“What’s the matter, Son?” said Mother, greatly surprised, for she knew him to be a

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happy soul, who generally took things as they came.

"I don't want to go to bed," he said.

"That can't be it," said Mother gently. "You always go to bed at this time. I know you wouldn't make a fuss about such a thing as that."

Then he lifted to her a face so old and full of misery that it shook her to the depths of her heart, — as nothing in her comfortable life ever shook her.

"I haven't accomplished anything all day," he said. "If I've got to live like that, I don't want to live."

Then Mother took both his hands, hoping humbly that she might be able to follow where led this little child of hers, and tried to explain to him that it could not be expected of a little boy to do great things every day. So the lines smoothed themselves out of his face, for at eight it is easy to forget your wasted life in your Mother's arms.

Father had gone out to dinner, and Mother and Son sat for a long time together on the

“Son”

library sofa. In their companionship that night there was an intensity that did not belong to the life of every day — “though it would,” her heart cried out in bitter self-reproach, “if I didn’t let a host of things come between!”

“Whatever happens,” said Son slowly, “when I’m grown up, — whatever I do, — it will all come back to this.”

“How do you mean?” asked Mother.

“Back to this,” he repeated. “To all these books — with stories in them that happened long ago — and the lamp — and to you and me sitting here together.”

Mother looked at him, in the serge jacket and white collar which had been substituted this winter for sailor suits, his head all the more fine and delicate for the rougher clothes; his whole body trembling with what he felt, while he thus projected himself into the future. And she determined to hold the picture fast. Before he went to bed he told her all about his old lady, and obtained her permission to ask her to the house.

The Reflex

Son's old lady was on her knees before the leather trunk. The row of tulips drooped a little, for she had forgotten to water them that day. She shoved the papers one side, — copies of reports and all, — and with quick motions threw out one after another various articles of clothing, throwing over one arm what she needed, and dropping the rest unheeded on the floor.

Had any of her fellow inmates of the Home come in just then, the little room, once so drearily in order, would have presented to their eyes quite a festive appearance of confusion. But none came. They did not break in upon her very often, for she did not suffer from rheumatism, nor did she have any fault to find with the régime of the institution or with the food. There were certain rumors about her. It was whispered that she had refused a pension from the War Department, saying that her husband's services to his country had been freely given, and that his widow declined to accept pay for them. But that was long ago, when she was young and

“Son”

could support herself by teaching. If she had foreseen that she must end her days as a recipient of charity, would her answer have been the same? Some shook their heads, others kept silence, but all in their inner consciousness felt pretty sure that it would.

The old lady, having laid the other articles on a chair, pulled out very carefully from the bottom of the trunk the package she had been seeking. It was wrapped in a camel's-hair shawl and pinned with many pins. She took it in her arms as if it had been a baby, and carried it to the bed. When she had taken it out, she stood back and looked at it. It was a dress of rich black silk, and she had not had it on for fifteen years.

She hurried with her dressing, standing before the mirror to comb out the ringlets that kinked all the more for the dampness of the day. “It always *did* curl,” she said to herself. Then she put on the gown, which rustled not at all when she moved, so heavy and soft were the folds of it, and fastened the

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real lace at her throat with her best cameo pin. Her cap was lace, too, and had a violet ribbon on it. She wrapped her head, curls and all, in a solemn black silk scarf, from which her sweet face and live eyes looked out eagerly. She drew on her mitts, and threw a pelisse over her shoulders. Then she was ready, and closing the door softly, she ran down the stairs and out into the street, where she tried not to walk too fast.

To Son, no less than to her, this day had been one of anticipation.

"Why don't you wait until to-morrow?" Father and Mother had said. "We won't be in to-night until you have finished supper."

Son had not thought it polite to explain to them that their presence was not necessary to his party. He had begun his preparations immediately after lunch.

"You had better have supper in the dining-room," the parlor maid had suggested, quite willing to deck out the table with silver and candles for his pleasure.

“Son”

“Oh, no!” Son had answered, “we’re going to have it in the nursery.”

“But there’s nothing up there but a *little* table and chairs!”

“That doesn’t matter!” he had replied in glee. “They’re big enough for *her*. You’ll see!”

Mathilde had stood with unusual patience for a long time at the florist’s around the corner, waiting for Son to make up his mind on what flowers to spend his last week’s allowance of twenty-five cents. Finally he had decided on a tea rose. “That looks like her,” he had said.

“You can have two for a quarter,” the florist had remarked, hardly knowing why, for he was not given to generosity. And when Son had explained that he did not want two, the man had given him back fifteen cents.

Now the moment had come. There she was! — On the tick of the clock.

“Come up to the nursery,” said Son.

The nursery was a big room with three

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windows, containing toys both masculine and feminine of every sort. On one side was a much kicked sofa upholstered in green denim, and in the middle of the room a white painted table covered with a white cloth and set for three. Around the room ran a frieze of animals marching in solemn procession. Son pulled out one of the little white chairs as he had seen Father do for Mother, and the old lady made him a formal courtesy before she sat down, after which he pinned on the rose. Then in stormed Baby, and all ceremony was at an end.

"But, Baby," said Son, in that gentle tone of ineffective protest used habitually by elderly female relatives, "people don't drum on the table with spoons at parties."

"Baby does," was all the satisfaction he got.

When he found that his visitor did not mind at all, — appeared to enjoy the accompaniment, in fact, — he began to breathe freely. And as the meal progressed it became mirthful, almost hilarious. So it seemed per-

“Son”

fectly natural to Son to ask, when the table had been cleared away and Mathilde had gone down to the pantry with dishes,—

“What shall we play?”

The old lady’s eyes, looking about for ideas, met the frieze and were arrested by the leopard’s spots.

“Animals,” she suggested.

“I’ll be a bear!” shouted Son. “What shall Baby be?”

“A lion,” said the old lady. “A little furry one, that never eats anybody.”

But Baby said she wanted to be a zebra.

“It’s because we can’t have horses in this game, for they’re not wild,” explained the bear. “She’s crazy about horses, and she thinks zebras are the nearest.”

“Then I’ll be the lion,” said the old lady, getting down on all fours and growling dreadfully.

Father and Mother, climbing the stairs heard unusual noises. Above all the din—could it be?—they looked at one another. Yes, it surely was the voice of their Son!

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When they opened the door, the old lady arose at once, smoothed out the folds of her dress, and looked up at them without embarrassment.

“We were just playing animals,” she said.

Father and Mother thought that they had never seen so charming a picture. The color in her cheeks was that in the very heart of the rose, — the tint of skin and daintily modelled throat, framed in old lace, that of its outer petals. Face, form, and hair, — all old, and beautiful not in spite of this, but because of it. All old but the eyes. Those were ever young, for back of them burned the fire of an indomitable spirit. A daguerreotype come to life.

“My Son tells me you are interested in the war,” said Father. “If you wouldn’t mind coming down to the library, I’d like to show you some of *my* letters.”

The four went down together, and Father began searching in one of the table drawers. “Here’s one!” he said, and began to read:

“Son”

“WILLARD’S HOTEL,
September 3rd, 1863.

DEAR SIR, —

Brigadier General Gordon has come in entirely worn out, and he has not a staff officer left. I am quite willing to volunteer, and if I can receive a staff appointment will join him at once.

Yours truly,

CHARLES WARREN.

It will be of great service to me if the above arrangement can be made.

GEO. H. GORDON,
Brig. General, U. Sts.”

“That was grandfather,” he explained, looking at Son.

The old lady was looking at him too. “His grandfather!” she said softly. “It was the Brigade to which my husband’s regiment belonged.”

“Your husband!” cried Father. “Was your husband an officer? I don’t even know the name yet!”

“Winfield Graham,” she said.

“That’s an honored name to every one,” said Father quickly.

Son’s eyes grew big. That was the name

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of the officer in the story. The one who had been killed at Antietam. The soldier who had written the letter home. The man who had married the girl of the white house and the roses.

"Why, it was you all the time!" he said.

She drew him to her and kissed away his tears. "I won't tell you any more like that," she comforted him. "You see, when I told it to you I thought I didn't know any other. I can tell you a much better one now."

Son's drooping spirits rose.

"What about?" he said.

"Oh, about a fairy," she answered.

"What did she do?"

"It was a boy fairy. He was very powerful. And one day when he was floating through the air, looking about all the time to see what good he could do —"

"What happened?" said Son.

"He came to a tree that had been touched by frost when it was young. It was dead. And the boy fairy waved his wand over it—"

“Son”

“Yes?” queried Son.

“And the sap began to flow, and the little leaves to sprout, — and — it had come to life again!” she cried, giving him a great big hug.

THE END



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